SERMONS

ON

Several Important Subjects.

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VIZ.

I. An Enquiry into the ſeveral Cauſes which hinder the Enjoyment of Peace in Society.

II. Perfection in Virtue not to be attained by ſuch imperfect Creatures as Men. Wherein is attempted to be ſhewn, what Sort of Improvement is neceſſary to qualify us for the Divine Favour.

III. The Love of this World explained, and proved to be conſiſtent with true Religion.

IV. The Immoral Devotioniſt; being a Diſcourſe upon the Harlot's Excuſe for Sin, in *Prov.* vii. 14, 15. Wherein is conſidered, the Excellence of Moral Virtue above Poſitive Duties.

V. The Divine Omniſcience conſider'd as a powerful Motive to deter Men from Sin, and excite to Virtue.

VI. The Nature of Repentance, and ſome Miſtakes about it conſidered.

VII. The Whole Duty of Man briefly repreſented by St. *Paul*, in living ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly.

VIII. The Proſperity of Bad Men, and the Adverſity of Good Men accounted for, in a Way agreeable to the Nature and Attributes of God.

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SERMON I.

Being an INQUIRY into the principal CAUSES which hinder the Enjoyment of PEACE in SOCIETY.

Rom. xii. 18.

If it be poſſible, as much as lieth in you live peaceably with all Men.

WHEN our bleſſed Saviour made his Entrance into this World, we read that a Multitude of the Heavenly Hoſt deſcended from above to celebrate his Coming with a Song of Triumph. They ſung, " Glory to God " in the higheſt, and on Earth Peace, " Good-will towards Men:" Intimating, that the Deſign of Chriſt's Incarnation was to advance the Glory of God, by teaching *worthy Notions* of him; and to promote the Happineſs of Mankind by recommending the nobleſt Sentiments of *Love*, *Benevolence*, and a *peaceable Diſpoſition* towards one another.

 Whoever

Whoever reads the Precepts of the Goſpel with due Attention, cannot but obſerve how exactly they are calculated for the Good and Welfare of Human Society.

Our Saviour's Sermon upon the Mount is in general a clear Demonſtration of this Truth; and the Injunction which he gives his Diſciples, to love not only their Friends and Neighbours, but even their *Enemies*, more particularly ſhews, that one great End of his coming into the World was to perſuade Men to live peaceably and quietly one amongſt another. "Ye have heard (ſays our Lord) "that it hath been ſaid, thou ſhalt love "thy Neighbour, and hate thy Ene-"my; but I ſay unto you, love your "Enemies, bleſs them that curſe you, "do Good to them that hate you, and "pray for them that deſpitefully uſe you, "and perſecute you. (*Matt.* v. 43, 44.")

Agreeably to this Doctrine, St. *Paul* (who was doubtleſs a faithful Expounder of his Maſter's Will) thus exhorts us in his Epiſtle to the *Epheſians*, "Let all "Bitterneſs, and Wrath, and Anger, and "Clamour,

" Clamour, and Evil-ſpeaking be put " away from you, with all Malice: And " be you kind one to another, tender- " hearted, forgiving one another, even as " God for Chriſt's Sake hath forgiven " you."

This is the ſoft Language of Chriſtianity.---- And is it not the Language of Peace? Does not every Exhortation to Love, naturally tend to promote Peace and Happineſs? For where Love is there can be no Malice, no Envy, no jarring Seeds of Diſcord to make Diſturbance in the World.

But if theſe be the mild Sentiments of Chriſtianity, how comes it to paſs that we ſee ſo much Rancour, Malice, and Cruelty, practis'd among its Profeſſors? Can the Diſciples of the meek and merciful *Jeſus* be guilty of *Inhumanity?* Can *Chriſtians* be cruel, injurious and oppreſſive? Can *they* who profeſs a Religion, the very Eſſence of which is Love and Charity, indulge the diabolical Paſſions of Malice and Hatred?

Experience too ſadly ſhews, that many Profeſſors of Chriſtianity act contrary to the

the Laws of their Profeſſion. For tho' they readily allow that it is both pleaſant and advantagious to ſee Men live together in *Peace* and *Unity*, yet their Conduct in Life is the reverſe of what they ſay. They talk indeed of Righteouſneſs, but are *Workers of Iniquity*; they *ſpeak Peace to their Neighbours whilſt Miſchief is in their Hearts.*

That we may all therefore be careful to promote Peace *by our Lives*, as well as to celebrate it *with our Lips*, I ſhall in the following Diſcourſe inquire into the principal Cauſes which hinder the Enjoyment of it.

1ſt. One of the fatal Cauſes which obſtruct the Promotion of Peace, is, when Men uſurp a Power over other People's Conſciences, and deny them the Liberty of judging for themſelves *in Matters of Religion.*

Truth, as it bears a near Relation to human Happineſs, is the Object of all Men's Concern, and therefore every one muſt naturally think he has a Right to inquire after it. It is upon this Perſuaſion Men

Men grow inquiſitive into the Nature of Truth, not thinking it ſafe to take things upon Truſt, where their Happineſs lies at ſtake.

From the *different Views* with which Men examine, from the *different Pains* they take, and from their *different Capacities*, it unavoidably happens that they eſpouſe Opinions *different* from one another. This Variety of Sentiments, which the very Conſtitution of human Nature makes unavoidable, might be innocently permitted, if Men would *differ quietly*. But ſome Minds grow peeviſh, angry, and malicious, when they ſee others contradict their religious Opinions. And many who aſſume to themſelves the boaſted Title of *Orthodoxy*, do, in their religious Diſputes, call out for Help to the Civil Magiſtrate: And ſo not daring to truſt their Cauſe (as if *they themſelves* were jealous of its Weakneſs) to be ſupported by dint of Argument, they reſolve to determine the Diſpute by the Point of the Sword. Thus the Spirit of Perſecution is let looſe in the World, which kills and ravages like a cruel undiſtin-

diſtinguiſhing Monſter, whom neither Learning, nor Virtue, nor any Circumſtance of Compaſſion can move from his bloody Purpoſes. His Arrows are unrélenting, and ſpread Deſtruction wherever they fly. When this evil Spirit has poſſeſs'd a Man's Heart, it roots out every tender Emotion of Love. And thus it is that Chriſtians become divided againſt Chriſtians; and the Religion of *Jeſus*, which was intended to preſerve Men's *Lives* and *Liberties*, is made the Inſtrument of *Slavery* and *Death*. It is owing to this tyrannical Spirit, that Multitudes of learned and pious Men, not only in *Popiſh*, but even *Proteſtant* Countries, have been maſſacred and deſtroyed to ſerve the Intereſt or Ambition of a Party.

But is this the Spirit of a Chriſtian? Is this a Practice agreeable to the mild Precepts of the Goſpel? Is this the way to promote *Peace* in the World?

Some perhaps may object, that Perſons who diſſent from the eſtabliſhed Religion of their Country, are juſtly perſecuted for their Opinions, when they tend to deſtroy

deſtroy the Welfare of Society; and ſo calling in the Aſſiſtance of the Magiſtrate to reſtrain thoſe Opinions is not calculated to *break* Peace, but to *maintain* it. In anſwer to this, it may be obſerv'd that Men are ſometimes puniſh'd for Opinions which do not in the leaſt tend to deſtroy the Welfare of Society. Experience ſufficiently ſhews that Men have been, and actually are puniſh'd (in ſome ſhape or other) merely for their Principles; tho' at the ſame time their Perſons and Characters are blameleſs, and they live like faithful Subjects, good Neighbours, and in all Reſpects Friends to Society.

But admitting it lawful to puniſh People on account of ſuch Opinions as deſtroy the Welfare of Society, yet the Magiſtrate ought not to exert his Power, till thoſe Opinions are reduced to Practice. For mere Opinions can hurt no Body, unleſs they are *rudely* propagated, or impos'd upon others *by Violence*. But to ſpeak properly, it is the *Actions*, not the *Thoughts* of a Man, which the civil Magiſtrate is concern'd to inquire

into. The Mind of Man is in its own Nature *free*, and not to be controul'd by outward Force. You may impriſon, and torment *the Body*, even to Death. Bút all this can never make any Man think otherwiſe than as Things appear to his *Underſtanding*. The Mind owns no Sovereignty but that of the Almighty, and will ſtill aſſert its Liberty in ſpite of all the Reſtraint Men *vainly* ſtrive to put upon it. So that to uſurp a Power over other Men's Conſciences is no leſs fooliſh and ridiculous than deſtructive to Peace and Quietneſs.

But you will ſay, it is a beautiful thing to ſee Mankind unite in the Belief of one and the ſame Religion. I grant it. But ſo long as Men are Men this is a Happineſs which is not to be obtain'd on this ſide the Grave. And if it could, Perſecution is abſolutely an improper Means to promote it. The Fear of Death, or the Loſs of Eſtate, or Confinement in a Dungeon, may force a Man *outwardly to profeſs* a Religion contrary to his Conſcience. But to ſuppoſe ſuch Means can make every individual rational Creature have

have the ſame Conceptions, the ſame Underſtanding, the ſame Judgment, is a Thing impoſſible. *Perſecution* may gain *hypocritical* Proſelytes to Religion; but it is *ſound Reaſon* and *free Inquiry* that makes *ſincere* Converts.

We ſhould not therefore treat any of our Fellow-Creatures with Rigour, merely becauſe they are of a different Opinion from us. For if Men have a natural Right to judge for themſelves in Matters of Religion, the Conſequence is plain, they have the ſame Right *to think differently* from one another: And if this Difference of Sentiment *is not patiently tolerated*, the *Peace* of Society will inevitably be broken.

2*dly*, Another thing which hinders the Progreſs of Peace is, when Men violate the Laws of *Juſtice* in their Dealings with one another.

Juſtice is the *Prop* and *Cement* of all Society. It is that which ſecures the Poſſeſſion and Enjoyment of the Neceſſaries and Comforts of Life. Without it Trade and Commerce would ſoon lan-

guiſh and decay, becauſe no Man would have any Encouragement to be *induſtrious*. For when Juſtice is baniſh'd from the World, and *Power a'one* takes Place, the Goods and Profits of the Earth are proſtituted to Thieves and Robbers. The poor Labourer is no longer counted *worthy of his Hire*; his Wages are withheld from him, either by Fraud or Violence, and he with his Family left expos'd to all the Miſeries of Want and Poverty. Even the *rich* Man, in the preſent Suppoſition, is perpetually in danger of having his Houſe plunder'd, and his Riches taken away by ſuperior Force.

Such would be the deplorable Condition of Society, if *a general Neglect of Juſtice* was to prevail in the World. We ſee *in Fact* that the Condition of Mankind is always diſorder'd and unhappy in Proportion as the Laws of Juſtice are broken down and trampled under Foot. How many Families do we frequently meet with that are depriv'd of the peaceable Poſſeſſion of their Eſtates by the Fraud, Oppreſſion, and Knavery of Others?

thers? And what are all the vexatious Law-Suits, which happen in the World, but the fatal Effects of Injuſtice? Which plainly ſhews, that the *Deſtruction of Peace* always attends the *Violation of Juſtice.*

3*dly*, Another thing, which obſtructs the Advancement of Peace, is, *the habitual Practice of Drunkenneſs.* This Vice is the Parent of all manner of Confuſion and Diſorder. For when a Man is inflam'd with too much Liquor, his Paſſions grow predominant, and Reaſon forſakes him, ſo that he lies open to all Sorts of Temptations and Follies. He is angry and impetuous, full of Luſt and unclean Deſires; he abuſes his own Companions, quarrels with every one he meets with, and by this Means makes himſelf an Enemy to all the Order and Peace of Society. But beſides this Diſorder, which he creates in public, do but conſider what Uneaſineſs he muſt give to his Family at Home; which perhaps is in time brought into the utmoſt Diſtreſs, through his Neglect or Extravagance. It

It behoves all ſuch irregular Livers ſeriouſly to conſider the fatal Conſequences of this Vice, which deſtroys the *Health* of our own Bodies, diſturbs the *Peace* of our Neighbours, ruins and confounds the *Order* of the World.

4*thly*, Another thing which hinders the Promotion of Peace is the Want of *Charity*.

By Charity, I mean that godlike Principle of Benevolence or Love to Mankind, which is implanted in our Nature on purpoſe to promote Peace, and Concord, and Harmony throughout the World. This divine Temper of Mind is the Fountain of all *ſocial Pleaſure*. The Affection of Parents, the Gratitude of Children, the Sympathy of Friends, the good Correſpondence of Neighbours, and the Agreement of all common Acquaintance are maintain'd and preſerv'd by the daily Exerciſe of this good Principle.

Of all the Impediments therefore that lie in the Way to *Peace*, there is none ſo pernicious as the Want of Charity. For it is impoſſible for a Man to have any Regard

gard for the *Peace* and *Quiet* of his Neighbour, unleſs he has ſome degree of *Love* for him. Love, as it hides a multitude of Faults, ſo it prevents a multitude of Quarrels, and by both theſe Ways ſecures the conſtant Obſervance of Peace. It is Love that is the Inſpirer of all thoſe tender Feelings which we have for one another. It produces every good-natured and gentle Diſpoſition. It wiſhes and ſtudies every Body's Good, and will not ſuffer a Man to deſign any Evil to others. On the contrary, a malevolent, contentious, and uncharitable Temper, breathes nothing but Strife, Diſcord, and Animoſity, ſubverting every thing that tends to Peace.

5*thly*, Another Impediment againſt the Promotion of *Peace*, is *Envy*. Envy is a Paſſion which frets and vexes, becauſe *other People* thrive and proſper; it grieves and repines at the *Good* of others, and rejoices at their *Adverſity*. If a Man poſſeſſes a larger Portion of Ground than ſome of his Neighbours, if his Cattle increaſe and Riches flow plentifully upon him, Envy ſwells big with Hatred and

Uneaſineſs, and cannot bear to ſee any one ſuperior to itſelf.

If a Man is at any time commended for his Ingenuity, Learning, or Virtúe, Envy ſteps in and oppoſes his Merit, either by denying that he has any Merit, or by diminiſhing it, and detracting from his real Excellencies, on account of ſome little Blemiſhes, which no Man on this ſide the Grave can be perfectly free from.

An envious Man, who thus delights *to ſpeak* Evil againſt his Neighbour, will be glad of any Opportunity *to do* him Evil too. And therefore it is impoſſible for ſuch a one to live peaceably with his Fellow Creatures. For, as St. *James* obſerves, "where Envy is, there is Con-"fuſion, and every evil Work." *James* iii. 16. I ſhall now,

6. In the ſixth and laſt Place, mention one thing more, which is a great Hindrance to Peace, and that is *Calumny* or *Slander*. This is a Vice which ſome Perſons run into out of I know not what Ambition to ſhew their *cruel* Ingenuity. And

and others of lower Underſtanding commit the ſame Fault to fill up a Gap in Converſation, when the common Stock of Impertinence is exhauſted.

The general Topic of Diſcourſe in many Sorts of Company is intirely level'd againſt the Perſons and Characters of thoſe that are abſent. By this Means the Reputation of a Man, which is dearer than Life itſelf, and conſequently ought to be treated with the utmoſt Tenderneſs, is defam'd and cenſur'd in all the odious Terms that *refin'd Malice* or *low-bred Spleen* can invent. Thoſe who give way to Cenſoriouſneſs and Railing do (as the Pſalmiſt ſtrongly words it) " *Sharpen* " *their Tongues like a Serpent*; *Adder's* " *Poiſon is under their Lips.* And thus, " *they ſhoot out their Arrows even bit-* " *ter Words:*" They rail againſt their Neighbours without any Mercy, aggrandiſing the ſmalleſt Infirmities into flagrant Crimes. Nor do they always confine themſelves to Truth in their Invectives, but often traduce the moſt innocent Man as the greateſt Villain: When perhaps the only Ground they have to think ſo, is

from the fallacious Intelligence of a *ſingle Hear-ſay.* It is by this Means many Men contract a habit of Lying, and charge one another with falſe Crimes, to the utter Deſtruction of all Peace and good Neighbourhood.

Thus I have conſider'd the principal Cauſes which obſtruct the Peace of Society. It is eaſy from hence to know what muſt be done in order to remove theſe Impediments. ---- Let *Vice* in every ſhape be baniſh'd from Society. --- Let *Virtue* have its due Effect upon us. ----- In particular, let ſtrict impartial Juſtice, and univerſal Charity govern all our Actions. Then may we hope to ſee Peace proſper and flouriſh throughout the World. Then ſhall we have a true Reliſh for the Comforts and Pleaſures of this Life. Then ſhall we *live peaceably with all Men.*

But if after all our Endeavours to live quietly with our Neighbours, we ſhould not happen to meet with Succeſs from every one. If ſome ſhould prove ſo obſtinate, that we cannot by the mildeſt Treatment live peaceably with them, we ſhall

ſhall undoubtedly have the Favour of all *wiſe* and *good Men*: And if that don't content us, we have the additional Satisfaction to think we have done our *Duty*, which God, who is the righteous Governor and Judge of the World, will, one Day or other, moſt aſſuredly reward us for.

SERMON II.

PERFECTION in VIRTUE not to be attain'd by ſuch imperfect Creatures as MEN. Wherein is attempted to be ſhewn, what ſort of Improvement is neceſſary to qualify us for the DIVINE FAVOUR.

MATT. v. 48.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect.

TO form right Notions of Religion, it is neceſſary for us to be well acquainted with *human Nature*, and to have juſt Apprehenſions of the *Divine Being*. For the Perfection of Man conſiſts in bearing as great a Reſemblance as he can to the Perfections of God, *i. e.* in ſtudying to imitate him in his Wiſdom, his Truth, his Juſtice, and his Goodneſs. The Precepts of the Goſpel require our Conformity to the Divine Nature only, ſo far as the preſent Condition of human Nature will admit. *To be a Saint* can imply no more than to act like

like a reaſonable Creature, to behave agreeably to the Circumſtances we are placed in, to labour after as much Goodneſs as we are capable of, and to make no proud Pretenſions to any thing beyond our Condition or Capacity.

My Deſign by theſe Obſervations is to remind you of the true Nature of Chriſtian Perfection, to ſhew wherein it conſiſts, that we may not give into the fantaſtic Schemes of ſome weak Chriſtians, who ſeem entirely to miſtake Religion, who clog it with ſuperſtitious Obſervances, or chimerical Fancies, who give ſuch an Account of Perfection as can never be obtain'd in this imperfect State; and the Apprehenſion of its not being attainable, makes many honeſt Minds grow ſick with Melancholy, and languiſh in Deſpair.

I ſhall make no Reflections upon any particular Sect of Chriſtians, but leave every one to apply what is ſaid, as he ſees it reaſonable. The Method I ſhall uſe in handling this Subject is,

I.

I. *Firſt*, to conſider that abſolute Perfection is not to be expected from ſuch a Creature as *Man* is. Notwithſtanding this, I will ſhew,

II. In the *Second* Place, that it is every one's Duty to grow in Goodneſs, and approach as near as we can to the Perfections of the Divine Nature.

III. I ſhall conclude with ſome practical Inferences.

I. *Firſt*, I am to conſider that abſolute Perfection is not to be expected from ſuch a Creature as *Man* is.

Perfection abſolutely taken, conſiſts in our acting at all Times, and in all Circumſtances agreeably to the Dictates of right Reaſon, or, which is the ſame thing, to the Precepts of Divine Revelation: It is always to preſerve unſpotted Purity of Heart, and an uninterrupted Regularity of Life: It is to keep ourſelves continually from every kind of Vice, and continually to practice univerſal Righteouſneſs.

Now what Mortal Creature is able to perform ſuch unerring Obedience? Who can ſteer his Conduct with ſo much Exactneſs, as never to commit *one* Act of Folly? If a Man proves ſo happy as to abſtain from *Habits* of Evil, can he always ſecure himſelf againſt every *ſingle Act* of Sin?

Every Man has ſome predominant Paſſion or Infirmity, interwoven as it were in the very Frame of his Nature. Whenever this Paſſion works within us, it bids Defiance to all the Suggeſtions of Reaſon; it bears down our ſober Reſolutions like a Torrent, and in ſpite of all Oppoſition hurries us into Sin. --- I appeal to your own Experience for a Teſtimony of this Truth.

But if any one ſhould deny that he ever felt this *ruling Paſſion*, I would aſk, what is the Reaſon that we often ſee a Perſon become a Slave to ſome particular Vice, who is in other Reſpects a very good Man? Thus, one Man who readily reſiſts all Temptations to *Injuſtice* and *Unkindneſs to his Fellow-Creatures*, who likewiſe retains ſome pious Regard for his *Maker*,

ſhall notwithſtanding be unhappily overcome by *Luſt and Venery*, or made a Slave to *immoderate Drinking*.

Again: Another Man who leads a Life of Temperance and Chaſtity, and is tolerably juſt in his Dealings with Mankind, ſhall nevertheleſs give himſelf up to the moſt *ſordid Covetouſneſs*, or *Ambition*. Another, who lives free from other Vices is oftentimes led Captive by *Exceſs of Anger and Animoſity*.

Now how can we account for theſe Blemiſhes and Inconſiſtences of human Conduct, but by ſuppoſing that there is in all Men ſome predominant Paſſion or Inclination which they cannot always govern as might be wiſh'd? And if this be the Caſe of human Nature, what little Ground is there to expect abſolute Virtue from ſo frail a Creature as Man? Eſpecially if we conſider how many leſſer Infirmities we have to ſtruggle with, beſides the *ruling Paſſion*, and what an infinite Number of Temptations continually hover about us, which often ſurprize us, at an unguarded Hour, and draw us into Sin before ever we are aware.

This Account of Man's Imperfection and Infirmity appears *juſt*, not only from the Conſideration of the inward Frame and Diſpoſition of human Nature, but alſo from plain Matters of Fact. The Lives of all Men have been conſtantly chequer'd and intermix'd with *good* and *bad* Actions; their Virtues have been ever blended with Vices. All Hiſtory, both ſacred and profane, is a ſtanding Monument of this mournful Truth.

Thus, in the ſacred Writings, *Lot* is repreſented as a Man of eminent Virtue and Goodneſs: And yet he was prevail'd upon, through Surpriſe, to commit Inceſt with his own Daughters. *David* was a Man *after God's own Heart*, and yet neither the Excellence of that Virtue which procur'd this amiable Character, nor the Majeſty of a King, nor even the Dignity of an inſpired Prophet, could prevent him from running into the complicated Crimes of *Murder* and *Adultery*.

Solomon was juſtly celebrated for the unparallel'd Greatneſs of his Wiſdom; and yet he indulged ſuch an extravagant Fondneſs for his Concubines, as made him

him turn aſide his Heart from the true God, and commit Idolatry with the Heathens.

Should any one think it wrong to have the Faults of theſe *Great Men* thus mention'd in public; let him remember their *Blemiſhes* as well as *Virtues* are recorded *in Scripture.* And ſurely this is done for ſome Reaſon; not indeed to harden Men in their Sins, but to encourage them to repent.

If therefore the Lives even of the beſt of Men are thus unavoidably chequer'd with Folly and clouded by Sin, how is it poſſible for any Man to attain *abſolute Perfection* in this *imperfect* State? "*The* "*Spirit indeed is willing, but the Fleſh* "*is weak; and tho' we delight in the* "*Law of God after the inward Man, yet* "*there is another Law in our Members,* "*which is continually warring againſt* "*the Law of our Minds, in order to* "*bring it into Captivity to the Law of* "*Sin, which is in our Members; ſo that* "*what we would, that we do not; but* "*what we hate, that we do; for the Fleſh* "*luſteth againſt the Spirit, and the Spi-*

rit

" *rit againſt the Fleſh; and theſe are*
" *contrary the one to the other; ſo that*
" *we cannot always do the Things that we*
" *would.*"

If ſuch be the Weakneſs of human Nature, and we evidently ſee it diffuſed abroad through all the Generations of Mankind, can we ſuppoſe Almighty God will exact from us a *ſinleſs Perfection?* There is no room to doubt but the merciful Father of human Race will make favourable Allowances for all our natural or *conſtitutional* Infirmities, provided he diſcovers within us any real Love for Virtue. For thus St. *Paul* encourages us to hope, " *If there be a willing Mind it is*
" *accepted according to that a Man hath,*
" *and not according to that he hath not.*
" (2 *Cor.* viii. 12.)"

But let us not preſume too much upon the Divine Goodneſs, and think he will excuſe our *wilful Perſeverance in Sin*, or forgive our *ſupine Slothfulneſs* and *want of Endeavour* to become virtuous. But this leads me to conſider,

2*dly*,

2*dly*, That it is every one's Duty *to grow in Goodneſs*, and approach as near as we can to the Perfections of the Divine Nature.

It is the expreſs Doctrine of Scripture that we ſhould "*grow in Grace*, and in "the Knowledge of our Lord and Sa-"viour *Jeſus Chriſt*." Which Growth in Grace, as St. *Peter* explains it, conſiſts in a diligent Endeavour "*to add to our* "*Faith Virtue, and to Virtue Knowledge,* "*and to Knowledge Temperance, and to* "*Temperance Patience, and to Patience* "*Godlineſs, and to Godlineſs Brotherly* "*Kindneſs, and to Brotherly Kindneſs* "*Charity. For if theſe Things be in us* "*and abound, we ſhall neither be barren,* "*nor unfruitful in the Knowledge of our* "*Lord* Jeſus Chriſt." *i. e.* We ſhall ſufficiently anſwer the End of our Chriſtian Profeſſion, if we ſtudy to improve in all moral Virtue and Goodneſs.

And is not this agreeable to the Dictates of right Reaſon? For do but conſider: Are we ambitious of excelling in *Speculative Knowledge?* Do we take Delight

light to contemplate *the Univerſe*, to ſtudy the Principles of *Philoſophy*, and be accompliſh'd with all the Branches of *polite Literature?* Is there not much more Reaſon to aſpire after Perfection in Virtue? To be pleaſed with every Improvement in Goodneſs? Can the Diſcovery of any ſpeculative Truth tend more to promote the Happineſs of Man, than the crucifying a vicious Inclination, or the forſaking a ſinful Habit? Can the Charms of *Poetry*, can the maſterly Performances even of *Muſic* itſelf, inſpire the Soul with a nobler Joy than that which ſprings from the Harmony of *well-govern'd* Appetites and Paſſions?

If the Generality of Mankind diſcover ſo ſtrong an Inclination to become *wiſe* or *knowing*, is there not much greater Reaſon for us to endeavour to be *Good?* And if the Pleaſure or Applauſe, which is the Reward of *Knowledge*, be more or leſs in proportion as a Man poſſeſſes that Quality; is it not the ſame with Virtue? The more *Goodneſs* we acquire the more *Pleaſure* or Happineſs we ſhall enjoy. No Man, you ſay, is *compleatly Good*.

For

For that very Reaſon no Man is *compleatly happy*. Would you leſſen your preſent Miſery, or increaſe your future Happineſs, increaſe your *Virtue*. 'Tis in vain to expect *conſtant Tranquility* of Mind, ſo long as Sin remains unmortified within us.

Admit we cannot arrive to an unſpoted Perfection of Virtue, ſhall we not labour to be as virtuous as we *can?* Muſt a Man neglect all Endeavour *to be wiſe*, becauſe he cannot be *a Solomon?* And will he refuſe to be Governour of *a Province*, becauſe he can't obtain the Command over *Empires?*

But who can tell how far human Induſtry can go towards the Point of Perfection? If we exert our Endeavours with indefatigable Perſeverance we ſhall certainly acquire greater Degrees of Virtue than we are apt to imagine.

On the other Hand, if we don't ſtudy to *increaſe in Goodneſs* we ſhall *increaſe in Wickedneſs*. For in a State of Indolence we expoſe ourſelves to every Temptation, and fall an eaſy Sacrifice to the Allurements of Sin and Folly; like a City that

is quickly taken and plunder'd, where the Garriſon neglect to defend it. Whatever vicious Inclination lies floating upon the Mind, if it is not timely reſtrain'd, will ſink deep into the Soul, and produce a *Habit of evil Action.*

On the contrary, every virtuous Diſpoſition, which the Soul is poſſeſs'd of, is in danger of being extinguiſh'd, if it is not cheriſh'd and improv'd by daily Care and Circumſpection. Tho' we can't get quite free from Sin in this frail State of Mortality, yet our bare *ſtriving againſt it* diſcovers an *Honeſty of Heart*; which will certainly recommend us to the Favour and Pity of our merciful Creator. To be abſolutely perfect as God is perfect, or to require any ſort of Perfection beyond what the preſent State of Humanity will bear, is (if I may be allow'd the Expreſſion) a mere *Quixotiſm* in Religion; 'tis ſuch a romantic Piece of Heroiſm as they boaſt of who talk of conquering Giants and fiery Monſters, which never had any Exiſtence in Nature.

But notwithſtanding this, to labour after as much Goodneſs as we are capable of,

of, to ſtrive to leſſen the Number of our Vices, to increaſe our Virtues, to imitate the Divine Being in his moral Character, ſo far as our Abilities will permit; this is a moſt laudable Ambition, this is all the Perfection which we frail Mortals can attain to. If our good Actions overbalance our evil ones, if we ſtrive to know and mend our Faults, if we are uneaſy with ourſelves whenever we diſcover our Want of any neceſſary Virtue, we may reſt aſſured we are purſuing the right Way to Perfection. And who can doubt but that the good God of Heaven will make favourable Allowances for our natural Infirmities and Miſcarriages, provided he ſees within us this *Honeſty of Heart and earneſt Endeavour* to grow in Goodneſs.

III. and *laſtly*, I ſhall now make a Reflection or two by way of Inference from what has been ſaid.

1. Since God Almighty does not require of us abſolute Perfection, it follows that all true Religion is ſuch as may be accommodated to the different Capacities

and Circumſtances of Mankind. Thus, as our Saviour himſelf ſpeaks, "to whom "much is given, much ſhall be requir-"ed;" and by parity of Reaſon to whom little is given, little ſhall be required. And therefore as the Righteouſneſs of Chriſtians in general muſt exceed the Righteouſneſs of the Scribes and Phariſees, ſo the Righteouſneſs of a Scholar, or wiſe Philoſopher, ought to exceed that of an illiterate and unknowing Mechanic.

The World indeed is apt enough to apply this Obſervation to *us of the Miniſtry*, whenever we commit a Fault. But whatever juſt Occaſion may be given for ſuch Application, it becomes the Nature of imperfect Creatures, when they ſee their Fellow-Mortals offend, to avoid all malicious and reproachful Cenſures againſt them, which can never be of much Service towards reforming a Sinner. And whether it be Laymen or Eccleſiaſticks that are *overtaken in a Fault*, Truth, when proper to be ſpoken, ſhould always be mix'd with Humanity and Candour. And thus St. *Paul* adviſes, "*Brethren*, "*if a Man be overtaken in a Fault*, *ye* "*who*

" *who are Spiritual, reſtore ſuch a one*
" *in the Spirit of Meekneſs, conſidering*
" *thy ſelf, leſt thou alſo be tempted.*"
Gal. vi. 1.

But 2*dly*, From the Idea of Chriſtian Perfection already given we ſee that Religion is a Scheme that is eaſy and practicable: Since it requires nothing but what is ſuitable to every one's reſpective Capacity. This affords great Encouragement to become Religious; whereas the contrary Repreſentation of Religion has a bad Influence upon Mankind. For it makes many of thoſe who are call'd *the polite* Part of the World, laugh at all Religion, as if it was nothing but a fantaſtic Notion; and it ſinks the Minds of many weak but honeſt People into Melancholy and Deſpair.

To conclude therefore; let us ſtudy to be as perfect in Virtue as our frail Natures will permit; let us uſe all proper Means to *improve in Goodneſs*; let us humbly implore the Divine Aſſiſtance in every time of Need; and our own Experience will ſhew us the Advantage of ſuch Endeavours. To ſum up all in the Apoſtle's Words

Words, " Finally, Brethren, whatſoever " things are true, whatſoever things are " honeſt, whatſoever things are juſt, " whatſoever things are pure, whatſoever " things are lovely, whatſoever things are " of good Report; if there be any Virtue, " and if there be any Praiſe, think on " theſe Things; --- And the God of " Peace will be with you." (*Phil.* iv. 8.)

SER-

SERMON III.

The LOVE of this WORLD explain'd, and prov'd to be consistent with true RELIGION.

1 JOHN ii. 15.

Love not the World, neither the Things that are in the World. If any Man love the World the Love of the Father is not in him.

THE Prohibition in the Text may ſeem at firſt view too hard for frail Mortals to bear. *Not to love the World, nor any of the Things that are in it* appears repugnant and even ſhocking to the natural Inclinations and Deſires of Mankind. Are we placed in the World, ſurrounded with variety of Objects, with Affections and Appetites ſuitable to thoſe Objects, and are we not allowed to take ſome Delight and Satisfaction in them?

Is it the Intention of a good Being to tantalize his Creatures by giving them Deſires, and at the ſame time totally forbidding them to gratify thoſe Deſires?

If this be the preſent Condition of human Nature, how uncomfortable is it? And who would not wiſh to die, rather than live where there is no Pleaſure, no Comfort, no Enjoyment of Life?

It muſt be confeſs'd, according to the Notions ſome Men have of the Chriſtian Religion, we have no Ground to expect any thing in this World but Pain and Miſery; and every Attempt to alleviate the Troubles of Life muſt be look'd upon as vain and fruitleſs, if not unlawful. But if the Ways of Religion *are Ways of Pleaſantneſs*, and *the Commandments of God are not grievous*, but eaſy, as Chriſtianity itſelf aſſures us, how fooliſh muſt it be for Men to lay *unneceſſary Burthens* upon themſelves? Or to think the kind Father of the Univerſe, *whoſe tender Mercy is over all his Works*, ſhould place Mankind upon Earth on purpoſe to make them miſerable?

That

That we may not therefore eſpouſe any Notion ſo unworthy the Goodneſs of God, nor terrify ourſelves with a more frightful Apprehenſion of the preſent Life than what it really deſerves, I will

I. Explain what is meant in the Text by by our being forbidden to love the World.

II. Attempt to ſhew that a moderate Love of this World, if we conſider it as the Production of a wiſe and good Creator, is not in itſelf inconſiſtent with the Love of God, or with true Religion. And this will naturally lead me to conſider,

III. What Qualifications are requiſite to prepare us for Happineſs in the World to come.

I. I will endeavour to explain what is meant in the Text by our being forbidden to love the World.

By *the World*, St. *John* himſelf, in the Verſe immediately following the Text,

tells us, we are to underſtand the *Luſt of the Fleſh, the Luſt of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life.* "*For all* (ſays he) *that* "*is in the World, the Luſt of the Fleſh,* "*the Luſt of the Eyes, and the Pride of* "*Life, is not of the Father, but is of the* "*World:*" *i. e.* The World we live in naturally abounds with Temptations to *Sin*; to *Pride, Senſuality*, and *Avarice.* Theſe are the three grand Enemies of human Happineſs, as they include the whole complex Idea of a *wicked Heart.*

It is evident from hence, that this Divine Prohibition againſt *loving the World*, means no more than that we ſhould hate and avoid *its Vices*, of whatever kind they be. This may further appear from the Teſtimony of St. *Paul*, who expreſſes what St. *John* calls the *Things of the World* by another appoſite Phraſe, *the Works of the Fleſh.* And what theſe are you will ſee clearly deſcribed by the ſame Apoſtle, in the 5th Chapter of his Epiſtle to the *Galatians*, at the 19th Verſe; "*Now the Works of the Fleſh are mani-* "*feſt, which are theſe, Adultery, Forni-* "*cation, Uncleanneſs, Laſciviouſneſs, Ido-* "*latry,*

" *latry, Witchcraft, Hatred, Variance,*
" *Emulations, Wrath, Strife, Seditions,*
" *Hereſies, Envyings, Murthers, Drunken-*
" *neſs, Revellings, and ſuch like.*"

Theſe are the Things of the World which by the Law of God we are ſo ſtrictly forbidden to love. And with good Reaſon are we forbidden them. For do but conſider what a horrid Train of Evils would unavoidably flow from a general Practice of ſuch enormous Crimes. Let any one caſt an Eye upon the *diſſolute* Part of Mankind, and he will eaſily ſee how much the Order and Welfare of Society is already diſturb'd and violated by Vices like thoſe in the black Catalogue enumerated by St. *Paul.*

God Almighty can never require Mankind to like or diſlike *the Things of this World*, but as they appear *beautiful* or *deformed*, and tend to promote our *Happineſs* or *Miſery*. *Love* and *Hatred* are two *irreſiſtable* Paſſions, and muſt neceſſarily operate upon us according to the *Nature* and *Quality* of the Objects we contemplate. Whatever is truly *amiable* and *good* in itſelf, and raiſes within us any *pleaſing*

Senſa-

Senſation or Idea, immediately becomes the Object of our *Love*: And the *contrary* does neceſſarily excite our *Hatred*. Now it is evident there are many Things in this World which are in their own Nature *good* and *agreeable*. May we not *love* theſe Things? We *may*; we *cannot but* love them.

To ſuppoſe our bounteous Creator has abſolutely forbid every innocent Gratification which the preſent World affords, is to ſuppoſe the World to be in the worſt Senſe a *Dungeon*, and that God confines Mankind in it on purpoſe to *plague* and *vex* them. But to ſay a *good* and *merciful* Being can do this, is a Contradiction in the very Terms. For it is impoſſible for us to conceive any *Goodneſs* in the Deity, whom the preſent Suppoſition repreſents as *delighting in the Miſery of his Creatures*.

We may therefore ſafely conclude, that the Command of God *not to love the Things of this World* can only ſignify ſuch Things as will prove *hurtful* to us in their Conſequences. And theſe are all kinds of *Vice*, which is evidently the Source of all our Miſery. But

But as for thoſe Things of the World, which do in any degree tend to promote our real Happineſs, they are proper Objects of our Love; and therefore we may innocently deſire them, ſo long as we do it with Moderation. This may further appear by ſhowing, as was propoſed under the ſecond Head of this Diſcourſe,

II. That a moderate Love of this World, if we conſider it as the Production of an infinitely *wiſe* and *good* Being, is not in itſelf inconſiſtent with the *Love of God*, or true Religion.

If we frame our Judgment of the World from the bitter Invectives which ſome moroſe and rigid *Pietiſts* have made againſt it, we muſt neceſſarily look upon it as a very *melancholy* and *dangerous* Conſtitution; a Conſtitution naturally tending to defeat all our Deſires of *innocent* Pleaſure. How this can be reconciled with the Goodneſs of its divine Author is beyond my Comprehenſion.

It is indeed allowable for thoſe who ſtudy the Reformation of Mankind, *to ſharpen their Arrows*, to the keeneſt

Edge, provided they are level'd at nothing but what is truly *vicious* and *hurtful*. Men, I ſay, may expoſe the *Sins* and *Follies* that are committed in the World, in Terms ſevere as they pleaſe. But to ſee a Set of peeviſh, diſcontented Mortals, upon every little Diſappointment they meet with in Life, *degrade* and *vilify the whole Conſtitution*, gives us room to ſuſpect that *they themſelves* are *worſe* than the World they exclaim againſt.

Whatever ſuch *Enthuſiaſts* may think, if we conſider this World as the Production of a *wiſe* and *beneficent* Being, we ſhall find it is in itſelf a *good* World, and can only become bad (as the beſt Things may) *by Accident*, *i. e.* by our *Abuſe* of it. This is a Truth which St. *Paul* himſelf does ſtrongly aſſert and maintain in the 4th Chapter of his *Epiſtle* to *Timothy*; where ſpeaking againſt thoſe who *forbid to marry, and command Men to abſtain from Meats, which God hath created to be received with Thankſgiving*, he ſays, *in expreſs Terms*, that " *Every Creature* " *of God is good, and nothing to be refuſed,* " *if it be received with Thankſgiving.*

(1 *Tim.*

(1 *Tim.* iv. 3, 4.) And the ſame Truth is allowed and confirm'd by the *wiſe Preacher of Iſrael*, who ſays that "*Every Man* "*ſhould eat and drink, and enjoy the* "*Good of all his Labour*; *it is the Gift* "*of God.*" (*Eccleſiaſt.* iii. 13. and in other Places.)

How then can a moderate Love of any thing that is *good* be inconſiſtent with the Love of *Him* who is *Goodneſs itſelf?*

Does this contradict the true Notion of *Religion?* By no means. For what is *Religion?* True Religion is briefly comprehended in the *Love of God.* And wherein conſiſts *the Love of God? To love God*, is to admire and adore his infinite Perfections, to acknowledge our abſolute Dependance upon him for our Creation, Preſervation, and all the Bleſſings we enjoy. In a Word, *to love God* is to rely upon the kind Protection of his Providence in Times of Adverſity, and to receive whatever good Things he is pleaſed to give us, with *becoming Thankfulneſs*; that is, in ſuch a manner as will incline us to obey his Laws, and return *his* Kindneſs *to us* by Acts of Kindneſs *to our Fellow-Creatures.*

Now if we are required to lay aſide all manner of Concern for the Things of this World, if we muſt have no Regard for its Comforts, Conveniences, and *harmleſs* Pleaſures, how can we form any Idea of God, as an Object worthy our Love? And what Obligation can we poſſibly be under to pay any grateful Acknowledgements for the Temporal Benefits he beſtows upon us, if we are abſolutely *deny'd the Enjoyment* of them? Surely a Being whoſe Goodneſs is boundleſs and inexhauſtible, who graſps the whole Univerſe in one cloſe Syſtem of Benevolence, can never be ſo unkind to his Creatures, as to give, and the ſame time *forbid to enjoy* what he gives. Therefore the Favours of Heaven, of what kind ſoever they be, are not to be look'd upon with a *ſtoical Indifference*, but receiv'd and enjoy'd with a *chearful Gratitude*.

But now againſt what has been ſaid in favour of the World, ſome rigid Profeſſors of Chriſtianity may poſſibly object; "How is this ſmooth Doctrine conſiſtent "with thoſe ſevere Precepts of Mortifi- "cation, Self-Denial, and ſtrict Abdica-

"tion

" tion of the World, which the Goſpel " ſo ſtrongly inculcates? How can the " Love of the World be reconcil'd with " the Command of our Saviour, which " expreſsly enjoins us *to take no thought* " *about it*; not even for the common " Neceſſaries of Life, *Food* and *Rai-* " *ment.*"

If the latter Part of this Objection be literally true, as drawn from the Words of our Bleſſed Saviour, I am afraid, it will ſet *Natural Religion* and *Chriſtianity* at variance with each other. For the firſt Law of Nature is, that every *living*, and much more every *rational*, Creature, ſhould conſult and provide for its own Preſervation and Welfare.

This our Lord cannot be ſuppoſed to forbid, when he ſays, " *take no Thought* " *what ye ſhall eat, or what ye ſhall drink.*" His Meaning then muſt be, that we ſhould not be *too thoughtful* about this World, beyond what is neceſſary for a comfortable Subſiſtence. And this is ſufficiently evident from the Original Word μεριμναω, which I think is unhappily render'd by *taking no thought*. It properly

ſignifies an *anxious Sollicitude*, ſuch as cauſes a *Diſtraction* and *Diviſion* among the Faculties of the Soul.*

As to the Duties of *Mortification* and *Self-Denial*, theſe will not be found inconſiſtent with a moderate Love of the World, if they be rightly underſtood. For all the Notion we can in reaſon entertain of them, implies no more than that we ſhould abſtain from every thing that is *vicious*, or in any reſpect deſtructive of human Happineſs. So that the Force of this Objection is fully anſwered by obſerving (as before) that Chriſtianity, when it bids us not to love the World, means no more than that we ſhould hate and avoid its *Vices*.

I ſhall only add, as a Confirmation of this, another Paſſage of Scripture from St. *Paul*, who, in his Epiſtle to the *Coloſſians*, having given an Exhortation "*to mortify* "*our Members which are upon the Earth*, "afterwards explains what they are, "namely, Fornication, Uncleanneſs, in-

"ordinate

* And thus *Virgil* deſcribes *Care*.

Animum nunc huc, nunc dividit illuc
Et rapit in partes varias. ——

" ordinate Affection, evil Concupiſcence,
" and Covetouſneſs, which is Idolatry."
(*Col.* iii. 5.)

From the whole therefore of what has been ſaid, we may reaſonably conclude, that nothing is *unlawful* but what is *ſinful*; and therefore a Man may indulge himſelf in any *innocent* Enjoyment of Life: And ſo far the *Love of this World* may be very conſiſtent with the *Love of God*, or true Religion; eſpecially ſince the *Scripture* itſelf aſſures us, that " *Godlineſs is profi-*
" *table unto all Things, having the Pro-*
" *miſe of the Life that now is*, as well *as*
" *of that which is to come.*"

Totally to eradicate and ſuppreſs our Deſires of worldly Good is impoſſible, and therefore our only Buſineſs is *to regulate* thoſe Deſires, and keep them within Bounds. We ſhould take daily Care not to deſire any *preſent* Enjoyment, in Oppoſition to a greater *future* Good; nor repine at the Want of Things *innocent in themſelves*, if they cannot be obtain'd by *lawful* Means. It is a golden Rule in Morality, *Si res haberi non poteſt, deme aliquid de cupiditatibus.* If the Thing

you deſire cannot be obtain'd, *ceaſe* to deſire it. Thus, if you cannot have Wealth, or Honour, ſtrive to be ſatisfied without them; and Experience will teach you, that ſuch Endeavour tends much to your Eaſe and Happineſs.

The preſent World, it muſt be confeſs'd, is unable to ſatisfy all our Deſires; and therefore we ſhould place our chief Dependance upon the Proſpect of a *better*. To which End I will now briefly conſider,

III. What Qualifications are requiſite to prepare us for Happineſs in the World to come.

It is generally allowed that *Religion* or *Virtue* is the only Foundation of human Happineſs, whether preſent or future. But as *Virtue* is a Term which includes a Complication of Ideas, we often miſtake in our Notions of it. However, it certainly implies *a Conformity to ſome Rule, the Obſervance of which will produce Happineſs*. Whether this Rule be that of *Right Reaſon* or *Divine Revelation* needs not to be diſputed, ſince both theſe *tally* to

to each other, and conſent in a perfect Harmony.

Now as the principal Means of procuring Happineſs lies in the right Government of our Thoughts and Actions, Virtue muſt neceſſarily imply a *pious* and *good Temper of Mind*, and *a regular Conduct of Life*. This is therefore the grand Accompliſhment which, according to natural Reaſon, is eſſentially neceſſary to make Men happy. For if God be a *virtuous* and *good* Being himſelf, he muſt be delighted with *Virtue* and *Goodneſs*, wherever he ſees it in his Creatures: And that which *he* delights in muſt neceſſarily be the Source and Foundation of all Happineſs. If therefore the true Sons of Virtue attain not to Felicity in the *preſent* World, they will certainly meet with it *in the next*. For a Being, who is infinitely *Juſt* and *Benevolent* to all his Creatures, can never ſuffer the Lovers of *Juſtice* and *Benevolence* to paſs for ever unrewarded. But of this we have an infallible Aſſurance in the *Divine Revelation*; and the Terms upon which we are to expect this Reward are very plainly deſcribed. Theſe are,

Faith

Faith in Chriſt, as ſent from God to deliver the World from Iniquity, *Repentance towards God*, and *a conſtant Practice of Morality*. The Sum of our Duty is briefly but very clearly expreſs'd by the *Prophet Micah* in theſe Words, " *He hath* " *ſhewed thee, O Man, what is good; and* " *what doth the Lord require of thee, but* " *to do juſtly, to love Mercy, and walk* " *humbly with thy God.*" Agreeably to this St. *Paul* tells us, that our Buſineſs in the preſent World " *is to live ſoberly,* " *righteouſly, and godly.*" And this he repreſents as the Ground of our expecting a bleſſed Immortality in the World to come.

This ſhort Account of Religion, as opening the Way to future Happineſs, is further illuſtrated by all the moral Precepts and Inſtructions contain'd in the Writings of the ſame *Apoſtle*. I ſhall only mention two of the moſt remarkable Paſſages; the firſt is, " *Provide Things* " *honeſt in the Sight of all Men.*" (Rom. xii. 17.) And in another Place, " *Final-* " *ly, Brethren, whatſoever Things are* " *true, whatſoever Things are honeſt,* " *whatſoever Things are juſt, whatſo-*

" *ever*

" *ever Things are pure, whatſoever Things*
" *are lovely, whatſoever Things are of*
" *good Report; if there be any Virtue,*
" *and if there be any Praiſe, think on*
" *theſe Things; and the God of Peace ſhall*
" *be with you.*" (Phil. iv. 8.)

Virtue, ſtrictly ſpeaking, is of a ſocial and publick Nature, which regulates and directs our Actions towards *others*. And therefore the beſt Preparation we can make for the *Acceptance and Favour of God*, muſt depend upon our *good Behaviour amongſt Men*, *i. e.* upon our living ſoberly, honeſtly, and lovingly one with another.

It is a fond Conceit of ſome ſuperſtitious *Devotees* who fancy they can merit Heaven better by *abſconding from* the World, and ſhunning the Society of their Fellow-Creatures. But where is the Glory of ſuch a Conduct? To abandon Mankind, and betake one's ſelf to a *Cloiſter*, out of a vain Pretence of becoming more holy, will give a Man juſt ſo much *Merit* as a *Coward* gains *honour* by flying from the Field of Battle into ſome ſecret Cave remote from Danger.

Perpetual Solitude is fit for none but idle *Drones* or *Enthuſiaſts*. The Beams of Virtue ſhine moſt conſpicuous in the Sphere of an *active* and *public* Life. And the true *Heroiſm* of a *Chriſtian* does not conſiſt in a fantaſtic Abſtraction *from* the World, but in behaving well *in* it.

The preſent Life is a kind of Theatre, which denotes a Scene of Action. Our Buſineſs therefore is to perform *the Parts* which Providence appoints us, with *Wiſdom* and *Integrity*. For this is the way to gain the trueſt Applauſe from *Men*, and the greateſt Favours from *God*.

Let us therefore live in the preſent World without *abuſing* it. Whatever Comfort or Pleaſure it can honeſtly afford, let us receive and enjoy it in ſuch a way as may beſt ſhew our Thankfulneſs to our Divine Benefactor. And as we know this World is inſufficient to give us *compleat Happineſs*, let us raiſe our Views to that better State of Exiſtence which both *Reaſon* and *Revelation* give us the juſteſt Grounds to hope for *hereafter*.

Whilſt

Whilſt we have this Proſpect before us, we ſhall go through the uncertain Journey of Life with much leſs Diſturbance about the Diſappointments and Troubles we meet with in it. In a Word, let it be our conſtant Care *to behave well towards God and Man*; and that will ſecure to us great Peace in this World, and immortal Happineſs in the next.

SERMON IV.

The IMMORAL DEVOTIONIST; being a DISCOURSE upon the HARLOT's Excuſe for SIN, in *Prov.* vii. 14, 15. Wherein is conſider'd the Excellence of Moral Virtue above all Poſitive Duties.

PROV. vii. 14, 15.

I have Peace-Offerings with me, this Day have I paid my Vows: Therefore came I forth to meet Thee.

THESE are the Words of an inſinuating Harlot, whom *Solomon* repreſents as laying a Snare to captivate a young Man *void of Underſtanding*. She ſtole out from her Houſe under the Cover of a dark Evening, and met with a Youth whom ſhe caught and embraced, and with unuſual Boldneſs thus addreſſed him: "*I have Peace-Offerings with me, this* "*Day have I paid my Vows: Therefore* "*came I forth to meet thee.*"

In theſe Words there is ſomething very remarkable and aſtoniſhing. For they

give us to underſtand that ſhe had been performing ſome Religious Ceremonies according to the Cuſtom of her Country, on purpoſe (as it ſeems) that ſhe might commit a plain Act of Wickedneſs with more Security. She thought complying with thoſe outward Forms of Religion, which were eſtabliſh'd by public Authority, would give her an Indulgence to commit a flagrant Immorality. The Uſe therefore I intend to make of the Words in the Text is,

I. *Firſt*, To conſider the abſurd Conduct of thoſe Perſons who indulge themſelves in many groſs Immoralities, and think to compound with God for ſo doing, by paying him outward Forms of Worſhip.

II. *Secondly*, I will endeavour to ſhew that all external Obſervances in the Buſineſs of Religion, will prove vain and uſeleſs, if they are not accompanied with Purity of Heart and real Goodneſs of Life.

I.

I. *Firſt*, I ſhall conſider the abſurd Conduct of thoſe Perſons who indulge themſelves in many groſs Immoralities, and think to compound with God for ſo doing, by paying him outward Forms of Worſhip.

It is a current Practice among the *Devotees* of the *Romiſh Religion*, to make the Obſervance of empty Ceremonies atone for their Immoralities. The Prieſts, taking Advantage of the People's Ignorance, impoſe upon them, whenever they ſin, a preciſe Number of Prayers and idle Forms of Worſhip. When theſe expiatory Sacrifices are perform'd the deluded Penitents are ſent away with the falſe Comfort of Abſolution, imagining themſelves to be purified from all their Vices. If they relapſe afterwards into their old Sins, it is but going again to the Prieſt, and renewing the Penance he injoins, and they ſoon become Saints again. Thus let them be as wicked as they pleaſe, if they do but pay conſtant Attendance upon their *Ghoſtly Father*, and obſerve the Ceremonies of the Church,

their Wickedneſs, they fancy, will never hurt them. So that according to theſe Men's Practice the unprofitable Forms of mere outward Worſhip are offer'd up to God, as *Atonements* for Immorality, and as *Commutations* for a *virtuous Life*.

I wiſh we could not ſee ſome deluded Minds making this Uſe of empty Ceremonies, even in *Proteſtant Communions*.

The common People, among all Sects of Religion, are prone to Superſtition: They are apt to entertain low and abject Conceptions of God, and to be filled with the moſt terrible Apprehenſions of his Anger, whenever their Conſcience accuſes them of Sin. In the midſt of this Anxiety they are ready to follow any Directions of their Superiors, recommended to them under the Name of Religion. Hence not conſidering that all ceremonial Obſervances can be of no manner of Service, any farther than they tend to promote Religion and Virtue ſo call'd, they think there is ſome wonderful Efficacy in the Things themſelves, as if they could ſupply the want of Virtue. And thus it comes to paſs, that Multitudes of Perſons

appear

appear mighty zealous in obſerving *outward Rites and Ceremonies*, who have but a very ſmall Portion of *real Goodneſs*. They come conſtantly to Church, hear Sermons, receive the Sacrament, and obſerve all ſuch ſacred Offices, even to a *ſcrupulous Exactneſs*. But notwithſtanding this, they make no ſcruple to lead *wicked* and *immoral Lives*, they continue Slaves to their Paſſions, unjuſt and unkind to their Neighbours, and are ſtill ignorant of that *rational Piety* to God which is ſeated *in the Mind*, and diſplays itſelf in Acts of Benevolence to our Fellow-Creatures. Now what is the Reaſon ſuch Men ſo fondly affect this outward Shew of Religion? Is it not becauſe they either think thereby to gain the Applauſe of the World, or ſecretly imagine God Almighty will accept this *Tinſel Devotion* inſtead of *true Subſtantial Virtue?* But how ill-grounded this Fancy is, will appear by ſhewing, as was propoſed, under the

II. *Second* Head of this Diſcourſe, That all external Obſervances in the Buſineſs

ſineſs of Religion, will prove vain and uſeleſs, if they are not accompanied with *Purity of Heart*, and *real Goodneſs of Life.*

All true Religion conſiſts in a right Government of our Appetites and Paſſions, in leading a Life of Temperance and Sobriety, with regard to ourſelves, in ſhewing all poſſible Acts of Kindneſs to our Fellow-Creatures, and in keeping up in our Minds a juſt Senſe of our daily Dependence upon God, as our Creator, Governor, and conſtant Benefactor. This is true Religion conſider'd as *an End*, and all external Obſervances are only *Means* leading to that End. As therefore in the Nature of Things, the *End* is more Noble than the *Means*, ſo *Moral Virtue* is far more excellent than all *outward Ceremonies.* The Prophet *Micah*, has repreſented this Matter in a clear Light, and ſhewn us the juſt Preference of inward Goodneſs and Piety, and the Inſignificance of all outward Forms without them. The Prophet introduces the King of *Moab* inquiring of *Balaam* what true Religion is. " *O my People, remember now*

" *what*

" *what* Balak *King of* Moab *conſulted,*
" *and what* Balaam *the Son of* Beor *an-*
" *ſwered him from* Shittim *unto* Gilgal,
" *that ye may know the Righteouſneſs of*
" *the Lord.*

" *Wherewith* (ſays the King of *Moab*)
" *ſhall I come before the Lord, and bow*
" *my ſelf before the high God? Shall I*
" *come before him with Burnt-Offerings,*
" *with Calves of a Year old? Will the*
" *Lord be pleaſed with thouſands of Rams,*
" *or with ten thouſands of Rivers of Oil?*
" *Shall I give my Firſt-born for my Tranſ-*
" *greſſion, the Fruit of my Body for the*
" *Sin of my Soul?*"

To theſe Queſtions *Balaam* thus Anſwers, " *He hath ſhewed thee, O Man,*
" *what is good: And what doth the Lord*
" *require of thee but to do juſtly, and to*
" *love Mercy, and to walk humbly with*
" *thy God.*" (Micah vi. 5, &c.)

Agreeable to this St. *Paul* aſſures us, that the End of Chriſtian Revelation is to teach Men to " *live ſoberly, righteouſly,*
" *and godly in this preſent World.*" And our Saviour expreſsly aſſures us, that no ceremonious Methods of Atonement with-

out practical Goodneſs, will entitle us to the Rewards of Chriſtianity. " *Not e-*
" *very one that ſaith unto me Lord, Lord,*
" *ſhall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven,*
" *but he that doth the Will of my Father*
" *which is in Heaven.*"

All Duties, whether Moral or Poſitive, injoin'd by God can't be injoin'd by him for any Good they do *him*. For " *can a*
" *Man be profitable unto God, as he that*
" *is wiſe may be profitable to himſelf?*" (*Job* xxii. 2.) The only Reaſon why they are at any time injoin'd, can only be that they may do Good *to us*. But Poſitive Duties without Moral, are evidently unprofitable, not only from the expreſs Declarations of Scripture, but alſo from the Nature of the Thing itſelf. For to view this Matter in its proper Light; let us ſuppoſe a Man regularly to attend all the Offices of public Worſhip, to obſerve all the Faſts and Feaſts of the Church, and to pray every Day with all the outward Marks of Devotion; at the ſame time imagine him to neglect the Duties of Social Life, to take no Care to provide for himſelf and Family, by the Practice

of

of a virtuous Induſtry; ſuppoſe him to be peeviſh, ill-natured, and cenſorious, a Slave to his own Paſſions, and a Diſturber of his Neighbour's Tranquility. --- The World we live in affords too many Inſtances of ſuch *Immoral Devotioniſts*. -- Now which way can we poſſibly conceive that ſuch a Man as this ſhould reap any Benefit from the *mere Forms and Ceremonies* of Religion? Do they operate upon us like a *Charm?* Can they infuſe ſubſtantial Joy and Happineſs into a Soul that is daily immerſed in Sin and Senſuality? Or is there any Reaſon to think that God Almighty will accept this *Religious Flattery* inſtead of *pure undiſſembled Virtue?* No; ſo far from it that it is an Aggravation of his Crimes. "*The Prayer of* "*the Wicked is an Abomination to the* "*Lord.*"

As ſoon might a Subject expect to procure the Favour of his Prince by bowing and cringing, and ſhewing all outward Homage to his *Perſon*, when at the ſame time he daily oppoſes his *Government*, and lives in a conſtant Violation of his *Laws*.

I would not here be miſtaken, as if I I ſpoke ſlightly of Poſitive Inſtitutions. Whatever God has injoin'd, it is our Duty to perform. My Deſign is only to ſhew the comparative Excellence of Moral Duties, and that the moſt ſtrict Obſervance of all Poſitive Inſtitutions will not ſupply the Place, or atone for the neglect, of theſe. "*I will have Mercy and not* "*Sacrifice*," *i. e.* rather than Sacrifice, ſays God; and our Saviour makes the Diſtinction plain, by telling us which are the weightier Matters of the Law, namely, "*Judgment, Mercy, and Faith.*" (*Mat.* xxiii. 23.) In compariſon of which all external Obſervances are like *tithing Mint, Aniſe, and Cummin.* Theſe weighty Matters are the ſubſtantial Part, while the others in Compariſon are only the Shadow of Religion. "*Theſe are the Things* "*which ye ought to have done, and not* "*to leave the others undone.*" But if you truſt to Poſitive Inſtitutions alone, "*in* "*vain do ye worſhip me.*" God will not accept any external Services of Sacrifices, Prayers, or Praiſes, unleſs they come from clean Hands and a pure Heart. Nay, ſo far

is

he from accepting them, that they are an Offence to him. This is ſtrongly and beautifully expreſs'd by the Prophet *Iſaiah.* " *To what Purpoſe is the multi-*
" *tude of your Sacrifices unto me? ſaith the*
" *Lord: I am full of the Burnt-Offer-*
" *ings of Rams, and the Fat of fed Beaſts,*
" *and I delight not in the Blood of Bul-*
" *locks, or of Lambs, or of He-Goats.*
" *When ye come to appear before me, who*
" *hath required this at your Hand to*
" *tread my Courts? Bring no more vain*
" *Oblations, Incenſe is an Abomination un-*
" *to me; the New Moons and Sabbaths,*
" *the calling of Aſſemblies I cannot away*
" *with, it is Iniquity, even the ſolemn*
" *Meeting. Your New Moons, and your*
" *appointed Feaſts my Soul hateth; they are*
" *a Trouble unto me, I am weary to bear*
" *them. And when ye ſpread forth your*
" *Hands, I will hide mine Eyes from you;*
" *yea, when ye make many Prayers, I will*
" *not hear: Your Hands are full of Blood.*
" *Waſh ye, make you clean; put away the*
" *Evil of your Doings from before mine*
" *Eyes, ceaſe to do Evil, learn to do well,*
" *ſeek Judgment, relieve the Oppreſſed,*

" *judge the Fatherleſs, plead for the Wi-*
" *dow.* (Iſaiah i. 11, *&c.*)

Finally, Brethren; let us not deceive ourſelves. " *God is not to be mocked.*" If we place our Religion in external Acts of Devotion, without a due Regard to our Hearts and Lives, we have indeed no true Religion at all. We have only *the Form of Godlineſs without the Power*, which will be ſo far from availing us in ſupplying the Place of real Goodneſs, or atoning for any Wickedneſs, that it will increaſe our Guilt. If we *for a Pretence make long Prayers*, we have our Saviour's expreſs Word for it, that we *ſhall receive the greater Condemnation.* And again, he tells us, that *except your Righteouſneſs exceeds that of the Scribes and Phariſees, ye can in no Caſe enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.*

Now the Righteouſneſs of the Scribes and Phariſees lay all in outward Shew. They were ſtrict in attending the public Worſhip, in keeping Faſts, were rigid Obſervers of the Sabbath, and all the Rites and Ceremonies of the *Jewiſh* Church; and valued themſelves ſo much

on this Account, that they were ready to ſay, " *Stand by thy ſelf, for I am holier* " *than thou.*" And yet our Saviour compares them to *whited Sepulchres*, and tells them, " *Even ſo, ye alſo outwardly appear* " *righteous unto Men, but within ye are* " *full of Hypocriſy and Iniquity.*

In like manner we, if we truſt to our outward Performances, and indulge any Sin, ſhall find ourſelves ſadly miſtaken at laſt. Our Hope will be the Hope of the Hypocrite, which is as the *Spider's Web.* In vain ſhall we plead at the great Day, that we have obſerv'd Sabbaths, and other holy Times, that we have Faſted and Prayed, and given Alms, have been conſtant at Church, and at Sacraments: Nay, and if we were able to add to all theſe, " *that we have propheſied in* Chriſt's " *Name, and caſt out Devils, and done* " *many wonderful Works,*" he will nevertheleſs ſay to us at laſt, " *I know you* " *not, depart from me, ye Workers of* " *Iniquity.*"

Let us therefore take Care to be truly Religious, and not in Appearance only, *to be pure in Heart, to follow Peace*

with all Men, and Holineſs, without which no Man ſhall ſee the Lord; to keep a Conſcience void of Offence towards God and towards all Men.

" *Let us cleanſe ourſelves from all* " *Filthineſs, both of Fleſh and Spirit,* " *perfecting Holineſs in the Fear of* " *God.*" Let us endeavour to govern all our Appetites and Paſſions by the Rules of Reaſon and Religion, " *laying* " *aſide all Malice, and all Guile and* " *Hypocriſy, and Envy, and all Evil-* " *ſpeaking, and to put on as the Elect of* " *God, Bowels of Mercies, Kindneſs, Hum-* " *bleneſs of Mind, Meekneſs, long Suffer-* " *ing*;" always remembering that moſt excellent Rule of our Saviour, of *doing to all Men as we would they ſhould do to us.*

And let us be daily improving in every Chriſtian Virtue, *growing in Grace, and in the Knowledge of our Lord* Jeſus Chriſt, *until we come to the Fullneſs of the Stature, even to be perfect Men in* Chriſt.

We muſt not ſtop in our Chriſtian Progreſs, nor think of contenting ourſelves

ſelves with juſt as much Goodneſs as is barely ſufficient; for if we do, 'tis a ſtrong Sign that our Hearts are not right, and that we have no real Goodneſs at all. But let us make our Path "*the Path* "*of the Juſt, which is as the ſhining* "*Light that ſhineth more and more unto* "*the perfect Day.*"

SER-

SERMON V.

The DIVINE OMNISCIENCE consider'd as a powerful MOTIVE to deter MEN from SIN, and excite to VIRTUE.

PROV. XV. 3.

For the Eyes of the Lord are in every Place, beholding the Evil and the Good.

ALTHO' the Great Creator of the Univerſe is, in his own Nature, a pure Spirit, yet is he frequently repreſented to us in Scripture, as if he was a Being compoſed of bodily Organs, and ſubject to the ſame Affections and Paſſions which we frail Mortals feel working within us. He is ſaid *to have Eyes that ſee, and Ears that hear, and Hands* that execute the Purpoſes of his Will, in the ſame manner that we, by theſe Inſtruments, perform the Functions of our Animal Life.

From this way of repreſenting the Deity, ſome little and unreflecting Minds are apt to imagine, that the Supreme Being is, in reality, compounded of Fleſh and Blood, like human Creatures. But this Opinion is plainly abſurd, becauſe it is inconſiſtent with the very Notion of God, as it ſuppoſes him to be cloathed with Imperfection; whereas the Idea we frame of God includes in it all poſſible Perfection. To be inveſted with bodily Parts is that which makes us liable to *Corruption.* For nothing is capable of being corrupted but what is *corporeal* and made up of different Parts. For the Corruption of Things conſiſts in the Diſſolution of their Parts: And therefore as the Almighty Spirit is poſſeſs'd of infinite Perfections, he muſt be incorruptible, becauſe that is a manifeſt Perfection; and if he is incorruptible, he muſt be diveſted of all bodily Parts.

The ſame way of Reaſoning will likewiſe prove the Divine Being to be free from all human Paſſions. For as the Paſſions of Human Nature are viſibly founded in the Wants and Imperfections of Man-

Mankind, or at leaſt are plain Indications of our Wants and Imperfections, they cannot with any Propriety be attributed to God. But if this be ſo, " Why do the " Scriptures repreſent the Deity as a Be- " ing inveſted with bodily Parts and Or- " gans?" I anſwer; the Poverty of human Language, and the Narrowneſs of human Conception make it neceſſary to invent ſuch Forms of Speech, as are apt to give us the moſt lively Apprehenſions of Things *Spiritual* and *Divine*. Hence metaphorical and figurative Expreſſions, drawn from the Objects of Senſe, are ſo often made uſe of to elevate and ſtrengthen our Notions of ſuch Objects as are purely *intellectual*. For as we chiefly converſe, in this Life, with ſenſible Objects, we muſt be ſuppoſed to underſtand them better than things *Spiritual*; and by Conſequence are more ſtrongly affected with Similitudes and Forms of Speech taken from thence. It is therefore a natural Effect of the Divine Condeſcenſion, when he ſpeaks to us in the Scriptures, thus *to ſpeak to us after the manner of Men, becauſe of the Infirmity of our Fleſh.*

And thus from what has been premiſed we may learn to explain the Words of the Text. *For the Eyes of the Lord are in every Place, beholding the Evil and the Good:* The Meaning of which is, that Almighty God perfectly knows all the moſt ſecret Thoughts and Tranſactions of Men, in every Part of the World; with Favour beholding thoſe that are *Good*, and looking down with juſt Indignation upon them that are *Evil*.

The Uſe therefore I intend to make of theſe Words ſhall be to conſider the *Divine Omniſcience*.

I. *Firſt*, As it is an eſſential Attribute of the Deity; and

II. *Secondly*, As it ought to belook'd upon as a moſt powerful Motive to deter us from Sin; and engage us to the Practice of Virtue.

I. *Firſt*, I will conſider the Omniſcience of God, as it is an eſſential Attribute of his Nature; or, in other Words, I will endeavour to lay before you the Grounds

Grounds and Reaſons we have to believe that Almighty God knows all the Thoughts and Tranſactions of Men, how ſecretly ſoever they are contrived and carried on.

1*ſt*. That this Knowledge is eſſentially inherent in the Divine Nature, is evident from the Creation of the World. For as the beautiful Variety of Beings conſpicuous in the Univerſe were made by God, he muſt neceſſarily *know* the Things he has made. *Infinite Power* preſuppoſes, or at leaſt implies *Infinite Knowledge*. For no intelligent Being can have Power to act, but he muſt at the ſame time *know* that he has ſuch Power: And ſo far as that Power is actually exerted, ſo far he muſt *know* it has been exerted. Every Being therefore produced by God, muſt certainly be known by him: And whatever Properties, Inclinations and Powers he gives to any of his Creatures, it is evident he muſt be acquainted with thoſe Properties, and with all the various Operations and Effects, which Men perform by virtue of them. It is an expreſs Contradiction, to imagine that a *deſigning*, *creative*

creative Mind, ſhould be ignorant of the Things he makes or deſigns.

Suppoſe ſome ſkilful Artiſt to have fram'd a moving Machine, conſiſting of various Parts, and capable of performing many wonderful Operations; it will perhaps puzzle divers Spectators to explain, or even conceive the Contexture of its Parts, and the ſecret Springs by which it moves; but will any Man ſay, the Artiſt himſelf, who made the Machine, is ignorant of the ſeveral Parts of which it is compoſed, or that he knows not by what artful Contrivance it is made to move? Is Man then acquainted with the Operations of his own Hands, and can we ſuppoſe the *Supreme Being* to be ignorant of *his?* Did not the Almighty Spirit, with wonderful Energy both of Wiſdom and Power, create both the Souls and Bodies of Men? Can he therefore be unacquainted with the hidden Springs and Movements by which they act? Can he be ignorant, either of Mens internal Sentiments, or outward Actions? "He that "planted the Ear (ſays the Pſalmiſt) ſhall "he not hear? He that formed the Eye, "ſhall

" ſhall he not ſee? He that teacheth " Man Knowledge, ſhall he not under- " ſtand?"

2*dly*, Another Argument to prove the Omniſcience of God may be drawn from the Conſideration of his Providence.

If God preſides over the whole Univerſe, and governs all Things both in Heaven and Earth, is it poſſible for him to be ignorant of any thing in the *Syſtem* of *Humanity?* If he be the Sovereign Diſpoſer of human Creatures and their Affairs, muſt he not perfectly underſtand their Conſtitution and Conduct? No *human* Government can ſubſiſt without Knowledge. Much leſs therefore can the Government of the World, by *Infinite Wiſdom*, be carried on without *Infinite Knowledge*. Sooner might *unthinking Matter* underſtand the Nature of *Spiritual* Subſtances; ſooner might the Stones of a ſtately Edifice fathom the moſt ſkilful *Architect's* Deſign; ſooner might the *Ship* itſelf know how to direct the *Pilot*, than the all-comprehending Mind of God be ſuppoſed not to know the ſecret Nature of the World he daily guides and preſerves.

3*dly*, Another Argument to confirm the Truth of God's Omniſcience, may be taken from divers remarkable Events that have happened in the World through the miraculous Interpoſition of Providence.

This Argument is not indeed concluſive to any but thoſe who admit that the Deity has ſometimes interpos'd, in a miraculous manner, in the Direction of human Affairs. Thus, the important Events which the Divine Oeconomy brought to paſs in relation to the *Jews* of old, and to the different Nations they had to deal with, are a corroborating Evidence to what has been ſaid, that God is intimately acquainted with all human Affairs. Who can reflect upon the various Revolutions which happen'd to the ancient *Iſraelites* without ſeeing manifeſt Traces of the *Divine Knowledge?* For was it poſſible for the Almighty to have interpoſed in delivering that oppreſs'd People from the cruel Perſecutions of *Egypt*, if he had not previouſly *known* the Condition they were in? Or how could he have fram'd a Scheme of Government ſo ſuitable to the Genius of that untractable People, if he had not thorough-

thoroughly underſtood their natural Tempers, and moſt hidden Inclinations? If therefore the great Superintendent of the World has at any time interpoſed between Nation and Nation, to protect one and puniſh another, according to their reſpective Merit or Demerit, it is an additional Proof that he underſtands all the Deſigns and Tranſactions of Men.

4*thly*, To confirm this Truth, beſides the Arguments already alledg'd, there is another, which may be drawn from the Idea of *Infinite Perfection*. For if God be a Being infinitely *perfect*, he muſt be infinitely *knowing*; becauſe Knowledge is a manifeſt Perfection: And the more extenſive the Knowledge of any Being is, the more perfect it argues that Being to be. Conſequently, if God poſſeſs *Infinite Perfection*, he muſt neceſſarily have *Infinite Knowledge*.

Having thus laid before you the Grounds and Reaſons, upon which the Truth of God's Omniſcience is evidently founded, I proceed,

II. To conſider this Attribute of the Deity, as it is a powerful Motive to deter us from Sin, and engage us to the Practice of Virtue.

It is the Advice of *Seneca* to his Friend *Lucilius*, that he ſhould bear in his Mind the Idea of *Socrates*, or *Cato*, or ſome other excellent Man, and imagine him to be a conſtant Obſerver of his Actions. This the Philoſopher propoſes as a uſeful Expedient to keep a Man conſtantly virtuous in the whole Conduct of his Life. For it is a melancholy Truth, that Men, *in ſecret*, or with *wicked Company*, indulge many Acts of Vice and Folly, which they would bluſh to commit before the *wiſe* and *virtuous* Part of Mankind.

Let therefore the *Searcher of all Hearts*, *the Almighty*, let him be our *Socrates*, and our *Cato*; and if we judge it a matter of Diſgrace to do unworthy Actions before a wiſe Friend or Philoſopher, think what eternal Shame we expoſe ourſelves to, when we Sin before the all-ſeeing Eyes of God; his Eyes are in every Place. With Pleaſure he beholds thoſe that are *Good*, and looks down with juſt Indignation upon

on them that are *Evil.* No ſolitary Cave, no lonely Deſart, can ſcreen the Wicked from *his Light.* He views the whole Univerſe in a Moment. He ſcans our inmoſt Thoughts, and knows all the artful Ways by which wicked Men ſtudy to conceal their baſe Deſigns from human Intelligence. Even the gloomy Shades of Night, which the private Sinner makes his moſt pleaſing Aſylum, can never hide us from *God*'s Inſpection: For one piercing Ray from the Effulgence of his Omnipotence will kindle the utmoſt Darkneſs into a glaring Light. *Whither* then (ſays the Pſalmiſt in a rapturous Contemplation of God's Omniſcience) *ſhall I go from thy Spirit? or whither ſhall I fly from thy Preſence? If I aſcend up into Heaven, thou art there: If I make my Bed in the Grave, behold, thou art there: If I take the Wings of the Morning, and dwell in the uttermoſt Parts of the Sea; even there ſhall thy Hand lead me, and thy Right Hand ſhall hold me. If I ſay, Surely the Darkneſs ſhall cover me; even the Night ſhall be Light about me. Yea, the Darkneſs hideth not from thee; but*

the Night ſhineth as the Day: The Darkneſs and the Light are both alike to Thee. (Pſ. cxxxix. 7, *&c.*)

Agreeably to this the Prophet *Jeremiah* repreſents the Divine Omniſcience in Words becoming ſo ſublime a Subject. "*Am I a God at hand, ſaith the Lord, "and not a God afar off? Can any hide "himſelf in ſecret Places, that I ſhall not "ſee him? Do not I fill Heaven and "Earth? ſaith the Lord.*" (Jer. xxiii. 23.)

If then Almighty God is intimately acquainted with all our Thoughts and Actions, be they never ſo ſecret, let this Conſideration perſuade us to be circumſpect and watchful over our Conduct. We always think it reaſonable, that thoſe profligate Wretches, who pay no Regard to *Virtue*, ſhould, notwithſtanding, out of *Good-manners* and *Decency*, be careful of their Behaviour, when they fall into Company with Men of known *Wiſdom* and *Goodneſs*. Shall we not therefore eſteem it much more reaſonable to be ſolicitous about our Behaviour, when we are in the Preſence of the all-wiſe, the all-diſcerning, all-perfect God?

Suppoſe

Suppoſe the Follies we commit in private, were to be expoſed in the Face of the Sun, before a numerous Crowd of People, to be canvaſs'd and cenſur'd at every one's Pleaſure; could any Man, conſcious of his own Guilt, ſtand by and bear the mortifying Scene, without a dejected Countenance, and a painful Self-abhorrence? Why then do we not bluſh? Why do we not even ſhudder with Horror, when ſtriving to hide our Iniquities from *the World*, we fooliſhly expoſe them before the ever-watchful *Eyes of God?* Do we hide our Vices for fear of loſing our Reputation amongſt *Men?* Why then do we not equally fear, leſt we ſhould loſe the *Divine* Approbation and Favour? The Misfortune is, we don't let this Perſuaſion, that *God is every where*, ſink deep enough into our Minds: We ſeldom carry the Thought about with us. We wander indeed from Place to Place, ſurrounded on every Side by the Divinity, and yet continue forgetful of his Power, and unconſcious of his Omnipreſence. It is not therefore to be expected, but that we ſhall every now and

and then indulge ſome ſecret Sin, unleſs we labour to acquire an inward and (as it were) a feeling Conviction, that *God is every where*, that he knows all our Thoughts, and is acquainted with all our Ways.

Would any one aſſume the Mask of Religion in *publick*, and throw it off again in private Life, if he duly reflected, that the Almighty views him with a watchful Eye, and will, one Day or other, detect and puniſh all manner of Hypocriſy? It is utterly inconceivable, that a Soul which habituates itſelf to the Contemplation of this awful Truth, ſhould perſevere in a remorſeleſs Violation of the Divine Laws.

Let us therefore labour, by frequent Meditation, to keep up in our Minds a conſtant Senſe of God's Omnipreſence and Omniſcience: For by this we ſhall learn, that all our Attempts to conceal our Iniquities are vain and fooliſh, ſince the great Creator and Governor of the World ſees all our Thoughts and Actions, knows all our *private Haunts*, as well as publick Ways, and beholds both the Evil and the Good. The Good he behold

holds with Approbation, and will therefore reward them according to their Goodneſs; the Evil he beholds with Indignation, and will therefore puniſh them according to their Wickedneſs. Then, as *Job* ſpeaks, "the Hypocrite's Hope ſhall periſh." And on the other Hand, we may ſay with the Pſalmiſt, "*Verily there is a Reward for* "*the Righteous; doubtleſs, there is a God* "*that judgeth the Earth.*"

Let the Sinner therefore that ſtudies to draw a Veil over his Vices, reflect within himſelf, what Advantage he can have from thoſe Things of which *he ſhall one Day be aſhamed.* What will it profit him to hide his Deformity for the Sake of gaining an *undeſerved* Reputation amongſt *Men*, when at the ſame time he makes himſelf odious in the Sight of *God.*

The trueſt Religion is always the moſt private: and tho' Wickedneſs itſelf endeavours to be ſo, yet the moſt ſubtle Artifices are not able to conceal it any longer than the Almighty permits. Vices that ſhun the Appearance of *Day*, and the Inſpection of *human Eye*, are often ſeen to diſcover themſelves; and Providence, even

in

in this Life, makes many ſecret Offenders a publick Monument of his juſt Diſpleaſure. How often is the Sinner betray'd by his own guilty Fears, by the Confuſion of his Face, and the Change of his Countenance? Many times he expoſes his Follies by being over careful to conceal them: And ſometimes the evil Effects his Vices produce *outwardly*, render it impoſſible for him to hide them long. Is it worth while then to undergo ſuch Fear, ſuch Uncertainty, ſuch Diſquietude of Mind, for the Sake of gratifying any vicious Deſire? Are the Pleaſures of Sin committed in ſecret ſo ſweet and raviſhing, as to be put in the Balance againſt the bitter Pains and Anguiſh of Soul, which a Man is ſure to feel from the Recollection of his paſt Offences?

Why do we dread to have our ſecret Faults divulged? Is it not from a tacit Perſuaſion, that they are of ſuch a Nature as cannot bear to be examin'd, even by human Judges? If therefore we do Things which we cannot juſtify before *Men*, how ſhall we be able to juſtify them before *God*? And if we ſometimes ſcru-

ple

ple to ſin, when we are under the Apprehenſion of being ſeen by the *World*, how much rather ought we to check every Inclination to Vice, when we conſider ourſelves under the daily Inſpection of Heaven's all-ſeeing Eye.

Let therefore the Conſideration of God's Omniſcience be the Guardian over our Conduct. And this will conſtantly reſtrain us from all fooliſh and unmanly Actions. This will preſerve us from all *unjuſt* Cenſures of the World, and from the Shame, the Remorſe, the dire Upbraidings of our own Conſcience. Let us always remember, the Glory of every Man's Character lies in his *Sincerity*. This noble Character we are ſure to forfeit, whenever our Behaviour in ſecret, and that in publick, contradict each other. Let us therefore (in a word) from the Belief of God's Infinite Knowledge, learn *to keep a Conſcience void of Offence*, both in private and in publick Life; ſo may we reſt aſſur'd, that the righteous Governor of the World will approve our Conduct, and, when the Time of our earthly Probation is over, he will welcome us to a better

State of Exiſtence in thoſe endearing Words of the Evangeliſt, *Well done, thou good and faithful Servant, enter into the Joy of thy Lord.*

SER-

SERMON VI.

The NATURE of REPENTANCE, and ſome Miſtakes about it conſider'd.

MARK vi. 12.

And they went out, and preached that Men ſhould repent.

IF we give due Attention to the *Chriſtian Religion*, as deſcrib'd in the *New Teſtament*, abſtracted from the *falſe Gloſſes* which ignorant and deſigning Men have put upon it, I cannot but think it will appear to every honeſt Inquirer in the moſt amiable and engaging Light. For the whole Tenour of it is viſibly calculated to promote the *Honour* of God, and the *Happineſs* of Mankind. The Precepts it inculcates, are wiſely adapted to exalt our Natures to the *higheſt Perfection* they are capable of, whilſt the moſt *favourable Allowances* are made us in conſideration

ſideration of *human Frailty*. So that we may truly ſay with the wiſe *Son of Sirach* (Eccleſ. ii. 18.) "*As is the Majeſty of* "*God, ſo is his Mercy:*" Both are boundleſs and inexhauſtible.

His *Majeſty* has diſplay'd itſelf in the ſtupendous Works of Creation; and his *Mercy* has been conſtantly conſpicuous in the Courſe of his Providence. And tho' our Behaviour to him has not been always agreeable to that of *dependent* Creatures, yet he has always look'd upon us as the Work of his own Hands, whom he has daily preſerv'd with a *fatherly* Care and Concern. He has given us Rules to walk by, in order to advance the Rectitude and Happineſs of our Nature; and whenever we deviate from thoſe Rules, he has provided a Method for our Recovery. The ſame Revelation of the Divine Will which bids us ſtrive *to be perfect* in the Exerciſe of Virtue, *even as our heavenly Father is perfect*, the ſame Revelation declares our *imperfect* Virtue will be accepted by means of a ſincere Repentance.

Repentance is a Doctrine deſign'd by God to comfort the Minds of Mortals

when labouring under Remorſe for *Sin*, to which they are as naturally prone as the Sun is to decline. But ſome Chriſtians have eſpouſed ſuch *rigid* Notions of this Doctrine as make it appear a *Burthen* not much leſs than *Sin* itſelf. For the Courſe of Repentance which ſome *Caſuiſts* preſcribe, is not only *romantic* and *painful*, but even *impracticable*. And the Maxims of Religion have been made to carry in them ſomething ſo *rigorous* and *gloomy*, as makes many *weak* but *honeſt* Minds live in daily *Deſpair* and *Miſery*.

Such Teachers don't conſider that *Advice*, like *Phyſic*, ſhould be always accommodated and proportion'd to the *reſpective Weakneſs* of Men's Conditions and Capacities. For to ſuppoſe otherwiſe, is to repreſent the *good* God of Heaven as a *Tyrant*, impoſing upon his poor Creatures a Taſk too heavy for them to perform.

That we may not therefore diſtract our Minds with any *frightful ſuperſtitious* Apprehenſion of Repentance, I will endeavour, in the Sequel of this Diſcourſe,

I. To

I. To deſcribe its true Nature.

II. To correct ſome miſtaken Notions of it.

III. Produce ſome Motives to ſtir us up to the Performance of this Duty.

I. I will endeavour to ſhew you the true Nature of Repentance.

In all our Inquiries into the Duties of Religion, Mankind muſt be conſider'd as ſubject to the Authority of their Creator. God Almighty, as he is our *Maker*, is likewiſe our *Governor*, who has preſcrib'd certain Laws for the right Management of our Actions: which Laws we are under the ſtrongeſt Obligations to obey. But we have all (by mournful Experience I ſpeak it) in ſome Degree or other, tranſgreſs'd the Laws of God; and are therefore liable *to be puniſh'd* for ſo doing, ſince Puniſhment naturally follows the Violation of all Laws. But as the Divine Laws are abſolutely *perfect*, and we by Nature are *weak* and *imperfect*, our tranſ-

greſſing

greſſing them is ſometimes *unavoidable.* Can we not hope then to eſcape the Puniſhment due to ſuch Tranſgreſſion? Is God a *rigorous* Lawgiver? And will he exact *unerring* Obedience from *frail Mortals?*

Our paſt Actions cannot indeed be recall'd; we cannot alter the Nature of them. And therefore whenever we ſin againſt the Almighty, all we can do is, to acknowledge it ingenuouſly, and take care that no *ſingle Act* of Wickedneſs grows up into a *Habit.*

This is Repentance. This is that kind Method our merciful Creator has appointed to repair our loſt Innocence.

To commit Acts of Folly, to oppoſe the Dictates of Conſcience (which is the ſame thing as tranſgreſſing the Laws of God) is what all Men do in ſome Incidents of Life. But when we ſincerely regret our having done ſo, and don't ſuffer Sin, by frequent Repetition, to grow *predominant*, we then truly repent, and have a reaſonable Ground to hope for Mercy. If to this we add an humble acknowledgment of our Faults to God by

Prayer, we need not doubt of Forgiveneſs. For the Scripture aſſures us that "*Whoſo confeſſeth and forſaketh his Sin*, "*ſhall have Mercy.* (*Prov.* xxviii. 13.)

And this is agreeable to the common Light of *Reaſon*. For if a Man, through Infirmity of Nature, or the over-bearing Charms of ſome beloved Object, is drawn aſide from his Duty to God, tho' I grant he ſins againſt a Being whom he is under the higheſt Obligations to obey, yet when he ſincerely confeſſes his Fault, and for the future avoids it (at leaſt ſo as not to contract a *Habit* of doing Evil) can you ſay he is not a true Penitent? He has done all that lay in his Power to atone for his Miſconduct; and is it reaſonable to imagine that the *righteous* and *merciful* Governor of the Word ſhould require any thing more of him? To ſuppoſe he will, is to repreſent him under the Notion of a *cruel*, *implacable Tyrant*; a Notion, hardly to be mention'd without trembling.

Suppoſe a Servant, having neglected his Duty, ſhould apply to his Maſter and implore his Pardon with all Sincerity of Heart,

Heart, and atteſt that Sincerity by his *future good Behaviour*; would you not think that Maſter deſtitute of common *Humanity*, and cruel as a *Savage*, if he ſhould refuſe to pity his ſupplicating Servant? And can we entertain ſuch an Opinion of *God* as we deteſt and abhor in *Men?* Has *Man* bowels of Compaſſion, and does the *Deity* want Mercy?

If then we regret our paſt Miſcarriages, ſo far as we can know them to be repugnant to the Laws of God, and *forſake* them ſo far as we are able, we may reſt aſſured we have rightly performed the Duty of Repentance. Nor will every wilful Relapſe into Sin after ſuch Repentance deprive us of the divine Favour, provided we renew our Penitence, and take daily Care to keep Sin from reigning over us, *i. e.* from growing *habitual*. *In many things we all offend.* The beſt of Men are not *abſolutely free* from Vice. And therefore, if we ſuppoſe Almighty God to be *extreme* in marking and puniſhing every Miſcarriage we make, there is an End of the divine Goodneſs, and all our Hopes in God are vain and fruitleſs.

But to remove all Ground of Doubt that God will be propitious and merciful to ſinful Mortals, provided they ſincerely repent, he has expreſsly promis'd for the ſake of his Son *Jeſus Chriſt to forgive Men their Treſſpaſſes againſt him.* This Promiſe is frequently repeated throughout the whole New Teſtament. And St. *Peter* aſſures us, "*The Lord is not ſlack* "*concerning his Promiſe* (*as ſome Men* "*count ſlackneſs*) *but is Long-ſuffering to* "*us-ward, not willing that any ſhould* "*periſh, but that all ſhould come to Re-*"*pentance.*" (2 *Pet.* iii. 9.)

Before I quit this Head, I ſhall juſt make an Obſervation which may keep us from miſinterpreting ſome Paſſages of Scripture relating to this Doctrine. The Obſervation is this: When we meet with the Words, *Converſion, the New Creature,* and *Regeneration,* (if they ſignify any thing more then our being *Baptiz'd,* or acknowledg'd as Proſelytes to the *Chriſtian* Religion) their full Import is comprehended under the Idea of Repentance. But I think they are all *figurative* Expreſſions, properly ſignifying that we ſhould alter

alter our Way of Life, ſo far as it is repugnant to the Will of God, or the Maxims of true Religion.

And here let me add, for the Comfort of *weak* Minds, that when a Man begins to be convinc'd of his paſt Tranſgreſſions and Follies, and waits with impatient Ardour to become *a new Man*, he muſt not expect to have this happy Change wrought within him in a Moment. For as every Habit of Vice is contracted *by Degrees*, we cannot ordinarily forſake them but *by Degrees*. For the Cure of evil Habits is not to be effected by a *tranſient Thought*, or *paſſionate Expreſſion*, but by *repeated Acts of Reflexion* and *daily Watchfulneſs*. It will, however, be a ſeaſonable Relief to the Penitent to think he gains Ground upon his Vices, to ſee the Work of Reformation move forward, tho' it be by *ſlow Advances*. If we *continue* to ſtruggle againſt Sin, we need not doubt but we ſhall, in the End, obtain a compleat Victory over it.

Having thus endeavour'd to deſcribe the true Nature of Repentance, I ſhall now,

II.

II. Point out ſome miſtaken Notions of it.

One Miſtake, ſome injudicious but well-diſpoſed Chriſtians are apt to commit about Repentance, is this; they think it is never true, unleſs they can pour out Floods of Tears, whilſt they are engag'd in the devout Examination of their Lives. That this is a Miſtake, is plain, becauſe there may be *ſincere Sorrow*, where there are no *Tears*, and *Tears*, where there is no *true Sorrow*.

Beſides, if Repentance conſiſts in forſaking our evil Ways, that *mechanical* ſort of Grief, which expreſſes itſelf by *weeping* or *ſighing*, is quite uſeleſs and unneceſſary. And indeed all manner of Sorrow that does not produce in us a real *Reformation of Life*, is not only *uſeleſs*, but *fooliſh* and *ridiculous*.

2*dly*, Another Miſtake, ſome ignorant Minds are apt to run into, is to fancy they muſt inflict upon themſelves a Courſe of *bodily Severities*. They imagine, to puniſh the *Body* will mightily advance the Good of the *Soul*. This kind of Penance is injoin'd by the Prieſts of the *Romiſh*

Romiſh Communion, who in a very unchriſtian manner *lord* it over the Conſciences of the *Laity*.

Little, I think, need be ſaid to confute this Opinion: For if any Man is ſo weak as to think the Almighty is not ſufficiently pleas'd with a ſincere Confeſſion of the Penitent's Crimes, and with his utmoſt Endeavours to amend this Life, he has no Ground to expect the Divine Favour for any thing elſe he can do. And there is no ſort of Superſtition which a Man is not liable to embrace, who fancies himſelf oblig'd to undergo *voluntary Miſery*, by that very Method which the Supreme Being has kindly provided for our *Happineſs*.

3*dly*, Another Miſtake, ſome deluded Chriſtians commit in this Affair, is, they fancy their Repentance is never *compleat*, 'till they have confeſs'd their Sins to the *Prieſt*, in order to get his *Abſolution*. This is an Error which ſome of the Chriſtian Laiety are led into through a falſe Perſuaſion, that the *Miniſters of the Church have a Power to forgive Men their Sins*. The Abſurdity

Abſurdity of this Opinion may appear by theſe plain Arguments following:

The *Scriptures* all along declare that a Sinner is to be forgiven *upon Condition* of his Repentance. If therefore he *repents*, God Almighty will certainly forgive him his Sins, whether the *Prieſt* abſolves him or no. And if he does *not repent*, the moſt *authoritative Abſolution of the Prieſt* will never acquit him in the Sight of God.

If it be ſaid, the Prieſt is not to give Abſolution to any but thoſe who are *penitent*. I anſwer, how can he, or any Being *leſs than Omniſcient*, tell certainly when a Man is a *true Penitent*. If he cannot, his pretending to abſolve him is vain and inſignificant.

Beſides, as Forgiveneſs ſuppoſes a Debt to be forgiven, he only has Power to forgive, who is the *proper Creditor*; and who dare lay claim to that Title but *God* alone, in whom lies the ſupreme Power of *puniſhing*?

I ſhall not mention the Texts of Scripture by which the *Power of Abſolution* is pretended to be proved, becauſe they are

Texts of *doubtful Interpretation*, and becauſe I think, if what has been advanced be agreeable to Reaſon and the Attributes of God, thoſe Texts, if they relate to the Purpoſe in hand, muſt be interpreted conſiſtently with it. For all Scripture muſt be explain'd agreeable to *Reaſon*, and the *Divine Attributes*.

4*thly*, There is another Miſtake in the Buſineſs of Repentance, which wicked Men are apt to run into; and that is, *delaying their Repentance till the Approach of Death*. This is a fatal Miſtake indeed; an Abſurdity of the deepeſt Dye. For it ſuppoſes God Almighty will accept a *meer Form* of Repentance inſtead of *real Reformation*.

The Goſpel requires Obedience; tho' not a *ſinleſs*, yet a *ſincere* Obedience. And this conſiſts in a conſtant Endeavour to to practiſe all Virtue through every Stage of Life. Now Repentance cannot be depended upon as *ſincere*, unleſs we actually *amend our Faults*. But what time has a dying Sinner to reform his paſt ill Conduct, or to put his good Reſolutions *into*

practice, without which (I repeat it again) there can be no ſure Evidence that his Repentance is *ſincere*. The Truth is, he may *reſolve* to repent, but *really* to repent, *i. e. reform his Life*, is a thing impoſſible for a Man to do when the *Curtain of Death* is juſt drawing upon him.

I know the Fountain of *Divine Mercy* is never exhauſted. And therefore I dare not ſay a Death-bed Repentance is abſolutely unavailable with God. But it muſt be inſiſted, that ſuch a State is extremely *uncertain* and *dangerous*.

Let us therefore be always careful *to live in the Fear of God*, if we deſire *to die in his Favour*. And let us never put off our Repentance one Moment, becauſe we know not whether we ſhall live to another. And conſider, the leaſt Delay in this important Affair may bring us unſpeakable Trouble. That we may therefore more effectually obſerve this Duty of Repentance, I will,

3*dly and laſtly*, Produce ſome Motives to ſtir us up to the Performance of it.

One

One of the principal Motives to Repentance, may be drawn from the Conſideration, that God will certainly pardon us, if we ingenuouſly confeſs our Offences, and forſake them.

That God is a Being at all times *ready to forgive*, and *eaſy to be reconciled* to thoſe who offend him, is the neceſſary Conſequence of his Goodneſs. To aſſert the contrary, is the ſame thing as to ſay, that *Goodneſs* is not an eſſential Attribute of the Deity. And to believe a God *diveſted of Goodneſs*, is a Notion more uncomfortable than *Atheiſm* itſelf. For what have we not to fear from the Apprehenſion of a Being, who is ſuppos'd to poſſeſs *Almighty Power* without any Mixture of *Goodneſs?* Such a Being muſt have nothing but Malice, Revenge, and Cruelty in his Character. And the *more powerful* he is, the *more miſchievous* and *dreadful* muſt he appear. If therefore, the ſupreme Being will not pardon his ſinful Creatures, upon their *ſincere Repentance*, ſince Repentance is all we can do to gain his Favour, does not this Suppo-

ſition repreſent the God of Heaven as delighting in the Miſery of his Creatures? If we ſuppoſe he will *upon no Terms* forgive us, does not this ſeem as if he made us on purpoſe to be miſerable?

But *Reaſon* abhors this Notion, which is ſo *unworthy* of God, and ſo *terrifying* to Mankind. And the Scripture likewiſe repreſents the Deity in a quite contrary Light. His *Goodneſs* is there declared to be no leſs *unlimited* than his *Power*.

Among the numerous Deſcriptions we meet with in the Bible of the *Divine Mercy*, the *Royal Pſalmiſt* gives us one in Terms ſo amiable and affecting, as highly deſerves our Attention.

" *The Lord is merciful and gracious,*
" *ſlow to Anger, and plenteous in Mercy.*
" *He will not always chide, neither will*
" *he keep his Anger for ever. He hath*
" *not dealt with us after our Sins, nor*
" *rewarded us according to our Ini-*
" *quities. For as the Heaven is high*
" *above the Earth, ſo great is his Mercy*
" *toward them that fear him. As far*
" *as the Eaſt is from the Weſt, ſo far hath*

" *he*

" *he removed our Tranſgreſſions from us.*
" *Like as a Father pitieth his Children,*
" *ſo the Lord pitieth them that fear him.*
" *For he knoweth our Frame; he remem-*
" *breth that we are Duſt.* (Pſal. ciii. 8, *&c.*)

If God then be ſo ready to pardon the Offences of his Creatures upon their Repentance, what greater Motive can we deſire to the Exerciſe of *that Duty?* Surely, if we have any Spark of Ingenuity in us, any Senſe of Gratitude, any Deſire of our own Happineſs; if we will embrace Mercy when it is offer'd to us, we ſhould let this Conſideration of the *Divine Goodneſs, lead us to Repentance.* God is our never-failing Benefactor, he loves us with a more than *fatherly* Affection, and is daily ſeeking to promote our Happineſs. The Laws he has given us to walk by are all deſign'd for our *Good.* Shall we then be ſo *ungrateful* to *him*, as to live in the Violation of them? ſhall we be ſo *unjuſt*, ſo *cruel to ourſelves?*——

But if any ſhould be ſo unhappily deaf to his own Good, as not to be mov'd to

Repentance by the kind Propoſal of *God's pardoning Mercy*; let me urge another Motive drawn from the Conſideration of his *Vengeance*.

We ſee by Experience, even in this Life, that Vice expoſes its blind Votaries to variety of Evils. Our juſt Creator and Governor has ſo order'd it by Nature, that *preſent* Puniſhment ſhould, in many Caſes, follow the Violation of his Laws. This, I doubt not, many feel; and ſome are by this means led to Repentance.

As for thoſe Sinners who go on in a proſperous State of Iniquity, if they happen to eſcape being puniſh'd in *this* Life, they will aſſuredly ſuffer in the *next*. For the righteous Judge of the World will one Day or other make a Difference between the *Evil* and the *Good*. And therefore, if *Vice* is not ſufficiently puniſh'd, nor *Virtue* ſufficiently rewarded *here*, this ſeeming Inequality in the Diſpenſation of Providence will be ſurely adjuſted *hereafter*. If therefore, we die *in Impenitence*, we muſt expect to undergo that State of Miſery, which the Scripture threatens

threatens againſt all who perſevere in an obſtinate Diſobedience to the Laws of God. But if we *break off our Iniquities* by Repentance, while we have Opportunity of doing ſo, we ſhall be tranſlated after Death to a State of Joy and Happineſs inexpreſſible.

SERMON

SERMON VII.

The whole Duty of MAN, briefly repreſented by St. *PAUL*, in living ſoberly, righteouſly and godly, in this preſent World.

TITUS ii. 11, 12.

For the Grace of God which bringeth Salvation, hath appeared to all Men ;

Teaching us, that denying Ungodlineſs and worldly Luſts, we ſhould live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly, in this preſent World.

IN theſe Words we have the Subſtance of all Religion ſet forth, with remarkable Brevity and Plainneſs.

By the Grace of God, is here meant *the Goſpel*; ſo call'd, becauſe God, out of his own *free Grace* or *Favour*, revealed

it to Mankind: And by *appearing to all Men*, we are to underſtand its being propoſed to Men of all Nations and Countries, of all Orders and Degrees, to *Gentiles* as well as *Jews*, to the Poor as well as to the Rich. The Matter of it, bringing Salvation, implies, that it opens the Way to *human Happineſs*; which it does by a more copious Explanation of *Natural Religion*, and a more forcible Addition to the Motives of Virtue, than Reaſon alone had ſuggeſted.

The Duties it inculcates for this End, are very ſignificantly expreſs'd by *denying Ungodlineſs and worldly Luſts, and living ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent World.*

Sobriety, *Juſtice* and *Piety*, are the fundamental Parts of Religion, and our Obligation to practiſe them neceſſarily ariſes from thoſe three grand Relations which every rational Being bears *to God, to his Neighbour, and himſelf.* I ſhall therefore, in my following Diſcourſe, diſtinctly conſider,

I.

I. *Firſt*, The Nature and Reaſonableneſs of theſe Duties according to the Dictates of *Natural Religion*.

II. *Secondly*, I will ſhew the *additional* Obligation incumbent upon us, as *Chriſtians*, to obſerve them.

I. I will lay before you the natural Obligations we are under to practiſe Sobriety, Juſtice, and Piety.

1. I begin firſt with *Sobriety*. This comprehends all that Duty which is owing to *ourſelves*. It will admit of a twofold Conſideration. The firſt reſpects the *Soul*; the ſecond has regard to the *Body*.

1*ſt*. The *Sobriety* of the *Soul* conſiſts in a right Government of its Paſſions and Affections, in preſerving it from the Incroachments and Dominion of Senſe, and in cultivating and improving it with all the Accompliſhments of Virtue.

The original Word σώφρων, tranſlated *ſober*, properly ſignifies a Man of a ſound Mind, *i. e.* one, who is prudent and circumſpect, and uſes his utmoſt Endeavour to

to keep all his *mental Faculties* rightly diſpoſed, for the Exerciſe of thoſe Functions, which were originally intended by them.

Now as Man is created with a Principle, that always inclines him to deſire his own Preſervation and Happineſs; and is endued with Abilities for this Purpoſe, his own Intereſt obliges him to exert theſe Abilities, in governing his Paſſions. For the Paſſions, being in themſelves blind, impetuous, and violent, will, if not duly reſtrain'd by Reaſon, hurry Men on to Deſtruction and Miſery.

The ſame Reaſon equally obliges us to furniſh our Souls with all the Qualifications of Virtue.

Happineſs, how miſtaken ſoever Men may be *in the Means* to attain it, is undoubtedly the ultimate End of all human Actions. That which hath in it a Fitneſs to promote this End is called *Good:* And on the contrary, that which is apt to hinder it is called *Evil.* And therefore Virtue, as it has a natural Tendency to promote the moſt ſolid and ſubſtantial Happineſs, is, on that Account, the chief Good;

Good; and Vice, as it has a contrary Tendency, is, for that Reaſon, the greateſt Evil.

Now, if Virtue in general is to be practis'd, becauſe it tends to make Men happy, Sobriety is therefore conſtantly to be practis'd, as being *a Part* of Virtue, and having a *proportionable Tendency* to make us happy.

2*dly*, The ſecond Branch of Sobriety which reſpects our *Bodies* conſiſts in *Temperance* and *Chaſtity*. The former forbids *Exceſs* in Eating and Drinking; the latter prohibits the irregular Indulgence of other ſenſitive Appetites, eſpecially ſuch as tends to enfeeble our Nature, and impair our Health. There is a moderate and prudent way of gratifying our animal Deſires, which is allowable for the Preſervation of Health, and the Propagation of our Species: But he who tranſgreſſes the Bounds of Reaſon in any of theſe, *does Violence* to himſelf, and acts below the Dignity of his Nature, by letting his *rebellious Appetites* get the Aſcendant over his Reaſon, and ſo far as he indulges this Exceſs, he courts his own Deſtruction.

Self-

Self-Preſervation is, you know, the firſt Law of Nature, a Principle predominant over the whole Animal Creation. By *this* we are naturally inclin'd to ſeek ſuch Things as may do us good, and avoid thoſe that may hurt us. This teaches even the Beaſts of the Field to defend and provide for their own Safety: And accordingly, we find, they by mere Inſtinct readily follow the Dictates of this Natural Principle. But we who boaſt of Principles and Faculties ſuperior to thoſe of Brutes, do notwithſtanding, too too often act counter to the plaineſt Suggeſtions of *Nature*, and in direct Oppoſition to this univerſal Law of *Self-Preſervation*. For in all Habits of Intemperance, we baſely give up *the Man* to humour the *Brute*, and chuſe rather to wallow in the Mire of Sin and Pollution, than by a due Subjection of our Animal Appetites to the Government of Reaſon, aſpire after that Purity and Holineſs, which is the Perfection of our Nature, and the only ſolid Foundation of Happineſs.

If then the mere Light of Natural Inſtinct teaches even the Brute-Creation to

provide for their own Welfare, we, who have the divine Light of *Reaſon* ſuperadded to our Animal Nature, ought certainly to uſe all proper Means to promote our own Happineſs: And therefore ſhould be always careful to practiſe the Duty of *Sobriety*; becauſe this is the way to preſerve the Faculties of our Minds, and the Organs of our Bodies in that *good Diſpoſition and Order*, which is neceſſary for the Attainment of Happineſs. Whereas, if we neglect this neceſſary *moral Self-Government*, Miſery of ſome kind or other perpetually overtakes us. For daily Experience ſhews, that all habitual Intemperance and Debauchery diſgrace our Natures, corrupt our rational Faculties, impair the Health, and bring on untimely Death.

2*dly*, The ſecond Branch of Duty I propoſed to treat of is *Juſtice*. This comprehends all the Duties of our publick Capacity and Relation to others. "To uſurp or invade the Property of "another Man is Injuſtice: Or, more "fully, to take, detain, uſe, deſtroy, "hurt, or meddle with any thing that

" is another's without his Permiſſion, " either by Force or Fraud, or any other " way, or even to attempt any of theſe, " or aſſiſt them who do, are all Acts of " *Injuſtice*. The contrary, to render and " permit quietly to every one what is " his, is *Juſtice**." This may ſerve for a general Account of Juſtice. There is a remarkable Paſſage in the 13th Chapter of St. *Paul*'s Epiſtle to the *Romans*, which explains the Nature of Juſtice more particularly. The Words are theſe, " Render to all their Dues, Tribute to " whom Tribute is due, Cuſtom to " whom Cuſtom, Fear to whom Fear, " Honour to whom Honour. Owe no " Man any thing, but to love one ano- " ther."

From theſe laſt Words, we may gather, that *Mercy* and *Beneficence* are Part of that Duty we owe to our Fellow-Creatures, beſides that of ſtrict *Juſtice*. Thus, for Example, if I ſee a Perſon in any kind of Diſtreſs, and it be in my Power to relieve him, it is but fit and reaſon-

* Vide *Woollaſton*'s Religion of Natures.

reaſonable I ſhould do it, becauſe I might deſire and expect the ſame Aſſiſtance from another, were I in the like Circumſtances. This Mixture of *Benevolence* and *Juſtice*, is plainly comprehended in that golden Rule of Virtue which our Lord has enjoin'd us, (*Matt.* vii. 12.) "*All* "*Things whatſoever ye would that Men* "*ſhould do unto you, do ye even ſo to* "*them.*"

How reaſonable and neceſſary the Practice of Juſtice, in its utmoſt Latitude, is, appears from hence; that it is the *Baſis* and *Pillar* of human Society, the *Bond* and *Ligament* which keeps Mankind together in *Unity* and *Concord.* Without it there could be no room for Trade and Commerce, which ſubſiſts entirely upon a reciprocal Adminiſtration of Juſtice. In a Word, if the Laws of Juſtice were conſtantly violated, Oppreſſion, Fraud, Rapine, and Cruelty would, like an impetuous Torrent, break in upon the Peace and Welfare of Society; and the whole World would be nothing but a Den of Robbers. Every Man therefore, as a

Member of Society, is obliged to have an inflexible Regard to the Practice of Juſtice in all his Dealings: And he who wilfully neglects to obſerve this Duty, is unfit for the Company of Mankind, and deſerves to be baniſh'd from human Society, and have his Habitation among the wild Savages of the Earth, in Dens, and Caves, and unfrequented Deſarts.

Having thus conſidered the natural Obligations we lie under to *Sobriety* and *Juſtice*, the two grand Duties which we owe *to ourſelves* and *our Neighbours*, I proceed,

3*dly*, To conſider the Nature and Reaſonableneſs of *Piety*, as *that* includes our Duty to *God*.

I cannot better deſcribe this, than in thoſe full and ſignificant Expreſſions of our Catechiſm; which tells us, that our Duty towards God is, " to believe in " him, to fear him, and to love him " with all our Hearts, with all our " Minds, with all our Souls, and with " all our Strength, to worſhip him, to " give him thanks, to put our whole " truſt in him, to call upon him, to ho-

" nour

"nour his holy Name, and his Word;
"and to ſerve him truly all the Days of
"our Life."

Our Duty to God ariſes from the Belief of his *Exiſtence* and *Providence*; namely, from the Conſideration that he is the *Creator* and *continual Preſerver* of the Univerſe. *In him we live, and move, and have our Being:* And therefore as *dependent* Creatures, it is our *Duty* to acknowledge the *Wiſdom* and *Power*, to love and adore the *Goodneſs* of him, upon whom we depend. For he who made all Creatures at firſt out of nothing, can, if he pleaſes, by the leaſt Act of his Power, ſink them again into nothing. The only Motive which inclin'd the Deity to produce thoſe various Beings, which are in the World, was the Diſplay of his *communicative Goodneſs*; and it is the ſame Goodneſs which every Day inclines him to ſuſtain and provide for his Creatures. And therefore, the Conſideration of the Divine Goodneſs manifeſted in the Works of Creation and Providence, ſhould fill our Hearts with the warmeſt Sentiments

ments of Love and Gratitude. Theſe grateful Sentiments will beſt ſhew themſelves by Acts of Kindneſs to our Fellow-Creatures. For by this Means, we ſhall imitate the Divine Being, in the higheſt manner we are capable of.

What remains to be ſaid of our Duty to God, may be briefly comprehended in the Worſhip we owe him.

By Worſhip, I mean our acknowledging the Deity to be *what he is*, and ourſelves to be *what we are*, by all *ſuitable Ways*; by addreſſing ourſelves as *dependent Creatures* to him, who is the *Supreme Cauſe* and *Governor* of the World, by acknowledging the Mercies we enjoy, by applying to him for what he knows to be convenient for us, by obeying his Will, as far as we can know it, and patiently ſubmitting to his Providence.

Now the proper Ground of the Reſpect we pay to any Being is its *Excellence*; therefore, as God is a Being of *ſuperlative Excellence*, we ſhould pay him the *higheſt* Eſteem and Veneration, and upon all Occa-

Occaſions, diſcover the utmoſt Readineſs to adore his infinite Perfections.

Thus I have endeavour'd to lay before you the Reaſonableneſs of Sobriety, Juſtice, and Piety, according to the Light of Nature: I ſhall now,

II. In the Second and laſt Place, briefly conſider the *additional* Obligation incumbent upon us as *Chriſtians* to obſerve them.

Obligation to Duty, beſides what ariſes from the Nature of Things, may be conſider'd as receiving additional Force from the Will and Command of a Superior; *i. e.* from one who has a rightful Power to preſcribe Laws for the Government of our Actions; and who is both more able and willing to provide for our Welfare and Happineſs, than we can do ourſelves. Therefore, whatever Laws our wiſe Creator and Benefactor thinks fit to give us for the Direction of our Conduct, we, as his Creatures and Dependents, are under an indiſpenſable Obligation to obey them. Now the Goſpel is a Syſtem

of wholſome Laws, which God, in his Wiſdom and Goodneſs, has been pleaſed to give us, whereby to regulate our Lives and Actions. And as Rewards and Puniſhments are the proper Sanction of Laws, Chriſtianity threatens the heavieſt Puniſhment againſt thoſe, who obſtinately violate its Precepts, and promiſes the nobleſt Rewards to thoſe who obey them. Thus St. *Paul* ſpeaks, in the Second Chapter to the *Romans*, "*To them, who by patient continuance in well-doing, ſeek for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality*, will be given *Eternal Life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the Truth, but obey Unrighteouſneſs, Indignation and Wrath, Tribulation and Anguiſh upon every Soul of Man that doth Evil.*"

So that, if we will but conſider Things ſeriouſly, and have a due Regard to our true Intereſt, the Fear of future Puniſhment will naturally deter us from Habits of Wickedneſs, and the Hope of Reward as naturally excite us to the Practice of Virtue. There are, indeed, Multitudes of

of Chriſtians, who profeſs to believe the Promiſes which the Goſpel propoſes, as the Reward of Virtue: But they don't ſufficiently *reflect* upon them, nor attend duly to the juſt *Conſequence* of ſuch a Belief. For if they did, they would not ſurely chuſe Intemperance and a Fever, Luſt and Shame, Rebellion and Danger, Pride and a Fall, Cruelty with Hatred; they would nor chuſe theſe, before Humility and Safety, Religion and a conſtant Joy, Devotion and Peace of Conſcience, Juſtice and a quiet Dwelling, Charity and a Bleſſing, and at the End of all this, a calm Removal from the Troubles of this imperfect Life to a State of undiſturb'd Eaſe and Pleaſures Immortal.

The *bare Profeſſion* of Chriſtianity will profit us nothing, without *good Actions*. It is equally abſurd, for us to expect the Rewards of Religion without Obedience, as it is for a Huſbandman to hope for a Crop of Corn from a Piece of Land which had never been ſown. Our Saviour himſelf expreſly aſſures us, that "not every one that ſaith unto him

" Lord, Lord, ſhall enter into the " Kingdom of Heaven; but he that " doeth the Will of his Father, which " is in Heaven." (*Matt.* vii. 21.)

The Sum of what has been ſaid, is briefly this. The *Goſpel* is the Rule which teaches us our Duty; the chief Leſſons of which are, *to live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly.* Theſe are Things which, as I have endeavour'd to ſhew, are not only fit and worthy to be done, according to the Judgment of *Reaſon*, but have the ſpecial Authority of *God* to inforce them.

If therefore we deſire to poſſeſs our *Souls* and *Bodies* in *Health* and *Tranquility*; if we covet to live *peaceably* with our Neighbours and all Mankind; if we have any Value for the *Favour of God*, which is our *Supreme Good*; in a Word, if we deſire to live comfortably *here*, and be eternally happy *hereafter*; " let us deny all Ungodlineſs " and worldly Luſts, and live ſoberly, " righteouſly, and godly in this preſent " World; looking for that Bleſſed

" Hope, and the glorious Appearing
" of the Great God, and our Saviour
" *Jeſus Chriſt*, who gave himſelf for
" us, that he might redeem us from all
" Iniquity, and purify unto himſelf a
" a peculiar People zealous of good
" Works.

SERMON

SERMON VIII.

The Proſperity of bad MEN, and the Adverſity of good MEN accounted for, in a way agreeable to the Nature and Attributes of GOD.

JEREMIAH xii. 1.

Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with Thee; yet let me talk with Thee of thy Judgments: Wherefore doth the Way of the Wicked proſper? Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherouſly?

THAT there is an infinitely wiſe and good Governor of the Univerſe, is a Truth, eaſily perceived and acknowledged by all thinking Men. And the Conſequence is, that all his Diſpenſations to Man are contriv'd and carried on by the unerring Rules of *Wiſdom* and *Goodneſs*. If this be ſo, how comes it to paſs, that we ſee many *wicked* Men *proſ-*

proſper in the World, whilſt *good* Men are frequently *miſerable?*

This Difficulty I propoſe to encounter in the following Diſcourſe; and if what ſhall be ſuggeſted, ſhould prove inſufficient to ſilence all the Cavils of *unreaſonable Sceptics*, yet, I doubt not, enough may be ſaid for the Honour of Providence, to make every *honeſt* Mind perfectly ſatisfied and eaſy under the preſent Adminiſtration of human Affairs. The Method I ſhall uſe, is,

I. *Firſt*, To ſhew, that wicked Men, how proſperous ſoever their *outward* Condition may be, are not in reality ſo happy as we are apt to imagine.

II. Suppoſing they were more happy, and met with leſs Trouble than other Men in this Life, I will endeavour to ſhew upon what Accounts God Almighty may permit this, conſiſtently with the Character of a *wiſe*, *juſt*, and *good* Governor of the World.

III.

III. I ſhall remark that the Objection in the Text ſhould not in Reaſon make us entertain any diſhonourable Thought of the divine Diſpenſations, but rather teach us to infer the Reaſonableneſs and Neceſſity of a Future State.

I. I will ſhew, that *wicked* Men, how proſperous ſoever their *outward* Condition may be in this Life, are not in reality ſo happy as we are apt to imagine.

The Reaſon why thoſe wicked Men that proſper in the World are reckon'd *happy*, is, becauſe the generality of Men entertain a *wrong Notion* of Happineſs. They fancy it conſiſts in having abundance of *Riches*, being taught in common Language to ſay, a Man is *happy*, when by that Expreſſion, they only mean he is *rich*.

Now to ſhew that Happineſs does not conſiſt in *Riches*, let us but ſuppoſe *Envy*, or *Malice*, or only *Solitude*, to accompany the Poſſeſſion of them; and all the Happineſs vaniſhes like a Dream.

Imagine *the Man of Wealth* to be deſtitute of *Friendſhip*, *Society*, and the *Eſteem* of others; and what Satisfaction will his Riches yield him? On the other hand, where there is *Benevolence*, *Friendſhip* and *Humanity*, *fair Characters*, and *honeſt Actions*, tho' theſe be attended with *Poverty* and *bodily Pain*, they not only procure us the *Eſteem* of *others*, but raiſe a *joyful Peace* within *our own Breaſts*. Which plainly ſhews, that *Virtue* is the chief *Happineſs*.

Again, ſuppoſe only the Want of *Health* to be join'd with the Poſſeſſion of Riches; what Enjoyment can they yield? How can they make us happy?

Let us ſuppoſe once more the wicked Man has *every Temporal Bleſſing*. Let us fancy him *rich*, *honourable*, laden with *Titles*, and all outward Splendor. Let him too have *Learning*, the *Fire* of *Wit*, and *Force of Judgment*; give him *Youth* and *Beauty*, ſurround him with *Friends*, or *ſeeming Friends*; court his *Eye*; and ſooth his *Ear*, and open to his *Senſes* every *Natural Elegance*; yet even *all theſe* will not give him *true*

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Happineſs. For if he is *diſturb'd in his Mind*, as he frequently muſt be, he is no longer happy, than while he *forgets himſelf*, and *forbears* to reflect upon his paſt Life. His Riches will, indeed, furniſh him with many *Amuſements* for this Purpoſe. But can he *fly from himſelf?* Will he never in his *private* Hours ſuffer Uneaſineſs from the Rebukes of his *Conſcience?* And if he can't be alone without being thus *uneaſy*, what is all the Pleaſure and Pomp of Life? But you will ſay, he need not be alone, he may ever find Amuſement, and divert his Thoughts.---- So much the worſe for him; his Caſe is therefore the more dangerous; for if he goes on in Wickedneſs without looking back, his Conſcience, when awaken'd by the Apprehenſion of *Death*, or *Sickneſs*, or any other Means, will come upon him with redoubled Fury, and torment him more.

Again; If *Happineſs* conſiſted in *Riches*, the greateſt Part of Mankind would be unavoidably miſerable, and our great Creator would appear to have dealt unkindly

in not affording to every Man theſe neceſſary Means of Happineſs.

There is, I am ſenſible, a ſort of Men, who being out of Humour with the World, becauſe they want the *good Things* which *others* enjoy, view it all with a *ſtoical Contempt*, or Indifference. Such declaim againſt Riches out of arrant *Peeviſhneſs* and *Ill-Nature*. I am not contending for any fantaſtic Refinements that are *above* or *beneath* human Nature. Whatever real Satisfaction, Convenience, or Comfort, Riches can afford, we are bound by the Frame of our Nature to ſeek after that Satisfaction. But in reality do we not often ſee *Health of Body*, *Eaſe* and *Tranquility* of Mind dwelling in a *Cottage*, whilſt *bodily Pains*, *Fears*, and reſtleſs *Anxieties* fly daily about the *Palaces* of *Kings?* Which ſhews that Happineſs is ſomething *diſtinct* from *Riches*, ſomething which *Riches alone* can never give us.

The Sum of what has been ſaid, is this, we miſtake in our Judgment, when we pronounce a Man happy, merely becauſe he abounds in *Wealth* and external

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Pleaſures; that no wicked Man, how proſperous ſoever his *outward* Condition may be, will appear to be truly happy, when we conſider the *whole of his Circumſtances:* And therefore the Objection in the Text muſt fall to the Ground, becauſe it proceeds upon a falſe Suppoſition, taking for granted the Thing to be proved. But,

II. Suppoſing the Wicked are more happy, and meet with leſs Trouble than other Men, let us inquire upon what Accounts God Almighty may permit this, conſiſtently with the Character of a *wiſe*, *juſt*, and *good* Governor of the World.

It is evident from Reaſon and Experience, that Men are *Free-Agents.* We have *various* Powers and Faculties given us by the Supreme Father of the Univerſe, for *various* Purpoſes of Action. The *Superior* Powers of human Nature, are *Reaſon* and *Conſcience.* Whenever we act contrary to their Dictates, we incur *moral Evil*, when agreeably to them, we feel *moral Good.* This moral Good, which conſiſts in *Tranquility* of *Mind*, and the Eſteem

Eſteem of others, is the moſt ſubſtantial Part of human Happineſs; and every *virtuous* Man enjoys this Happineſs in Proportion to his Virtue. But a wicked Man, while he continues ſo, is incapable of this Felicity.

Again; Beſides this *moral Enjoyment* which ſprings from *Virtue* only, there are other Delights accruing to us from the Poſſeſſion of *Riches*, *Honour*, and *Secular Power*. Of theſe, many *wicked* Men have a greater Portion than the *Virtuous*. And the Reaſon is, becauſe ſome good Men are *weak* in their *Judgments*, and *imprudent* or *indolent* in managing their Secular Affairs; which expoſes them to many Inconveniences, and hinders their riſing in the World. Now if we aſk, why the Almighty permits this to the Diſadvantage of good Men, it is the ſame as if we ſhould aſk, why he made Men *Free-Agents*. For the *Difference* we obſerve in Men's outward Conditions and Circumſtances ariſes in a great Meaſure from the *different* Uſe they may make of their *Free-Agency*. The Diſadvantages virtuous Men labour under at preſent, will doubtleſs be re-

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compenc'd, one Day or other, by the juſt and merciful Governor of the World. In the mean time, the *ſolid Pleaſure* they enjoy as the *immediate* Conſequence of their *Goodneſs*, is ſurely preferable to any *external Advantages* the *Wicked* may procure themſelves by their ſuperior Cunning and Sagacity.

Again; Another Reaſon why God may permit wicked Men to *proſper* in the World, ſeems to be the natural Effect of his over-flowing Goodneſs. He does not haſtily deprive them of ſome Privileges they enjoy above the *Righteous*, from their *ſuperior Policy* and *Labour*, becauſe he would give them *more time for Repentance*. For when they come to conſider, that the indulgent Father of the World *continues* his Mercy to them, whilſt they continue to *abuſe* it; their Minds will be naturally fill'd with a ſtronger Conviction of their Guilt, and a more amiable Idea of the Divine Goodneſs.

On the other hand, the Reaſon why he ſuffers *good Men* to be afflicted in this World, may be to ſtrengthen and im-

prove their Virtue, by the Exerciſe of *Patience*, *Fortitude*, and *Reſignation* to his Will.

Perhaps another Reaſon why the ſupreme Being withholds ſome temporal Benefits from *good Men*, which the *Wicked* poſſeſs, may be, becauſe he foreſees they will prove *hurtful* to them. Alteration of Circumſtances often creates a Change of Manners; And there are ſome Tempers, which, I believe, would keep ſteady to Virtue *in a Scene of Adverſity*, and yet run into open and extreme Degrees of Vice *in a Scene of Proſperity*. Certain it is, we are all apt to deſire what is *improper* for us; and many fancy themſelves in a worſe Condition than their Neighbours, merely from a *diſcontented* and *querulous Humour*. God Almighty therefore may, with juſt Reaſon, permit ſome good Men to be afflicted in this Life, conſiſtently with the Character of a *wiſe* and *good* Being. But whatever Inſtances we meet with, of Perſons that are *truly virtuous*, and yet *unfortunate* in this Life, there is no doubt, a *juſt* and *merciful* Governor of the World

will

will one time or other make them *ample Recompence.* And this brings me,

3*dly and laſtly*, To remark that the Objection in the Text ſhould not in Reaſon make us entertain any *diſhonourable* Thought of the Divine Diſpenſations; but rather teach us to infer the Reaſonableneſs and Neceſſity of a *Future State.*

As we have inconteſtable Arguments to prove *in general* the Being of a God, and the Reality of his Providence, we have no Reaſon to entertain any diſhonourable Thought of the Divine Government in any *particular Inſtance.* For if we examine Things attentively, we ſhall find that every Objection formed againſt the Diſpenſations of Providence is entirely owing to *Human Ignorance.* We are abſolutely *unacquainted* with the Ways by which the Supreme Being governs the World. Indeed, 'tis impoſſible for *finite* Creatures to comprehend the Deſigns of an *infinite* Mind. With what Reaſon therefore can we preſume to ſay, any thing is wrong in the Oeconomy of the Univerſe? This is talking without Knowledge, judging without Ideas; which is

the ſame Abſurdity as if a Man ſhould pretend *to ſee without Eyes.*

To know the Juſtneſs of any Scheme, 'tis neceſſary to be acquainted with *all its Parts*, and all their *mutual Relations*. How then can we determine every Particular in the Scheme of Providence, of which we muſt confeſs ourſelves utterly ignorant? Should a Man take upon him to condemn a well-wrought *Tragedy* by only reading one of its Scenes, without conſidering how it was interwoven with the *main Plot* and Contrivance of the Work, would he not be juſtly blam'd for his *Partiality?* And is not *he* more inexcuſably partial, who cenſures the beautiful Drama of the *Divine Government*, without knowing the ſecret Contrivance by which it is carried on?

If there be any Reaſon to believe, that God is *infinitely wiſe*, *juſt*, and *good*, we have the ſame Reaſon to believe he governs every Part of the Univerſe with *infinite Wiſdom*, *Juſtice*, and *Goodneſs*. And if there be any Inſtances of *good Men* that are not rewarded *in this Life*, or of *wicked* Men that go unpuniſh'd here, the only

only juſt Inference from hence is, That there will be *another* Life, in which this ſeeming Inequality will be clearly adjuſted. We are, I think, reduced to the Neceſſity of believing this, or that God is neither *wiſe*, *juſt*, nor *good*. But this is a Notion, I ſuppoſe, no Man will eſpouſe in good Earneſt.

I ſhall only add one Obſervation more to juſtify Providence againſt the Objection in the Text, which is, that we are frequently *miſtaken* who are *really Good*, and who otherwiſe; and conſequently are very incompetent Judges when Men are equitably dealt by.

Let us therefore learn from what has been ſaid, to entertain the higheſt Reverence of the Divine Being and his Providence. Under all the Misfortunes of Life let us behave with Decency and Reſignation. If we bring any Troubles upon ourſelves by our own Imprudence or Wickedneſs, let them teach us to be more wiſe and circumſpect for the future. And under thoſe Calamities which are unavoidable, let us comfort ourſelves with this

this Perſuaſion, that the World is govern'd and directed by unerring *Wiſdom*, *Juſtice*, and *Goodneſs*. And to this let us add, that joyful Hope of a *future* Life, in which the *Virtuous* ſhall receive ample Recompence for all their Sufferings.

F I N I S.

MVSEVM
BRITAN
NICVM

E R R A T A.

PAGE 66, *l.* 23, *ſay* properly ſo call'd. *p.* 67, *l.* 20, *read* the Chriſtian Revelation.